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EDITORIAL

THE IRON TRIANGLE

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Ronald Reagan's favorite demons as he departs the White House are the news media, Congress and undefined special interests—what he loves to call "the Iron Triangle." He blames this mean combine for thwarting his efforts to balance the budget, blithely ignoring the fiscal predations of the real Iron Triangle: the Pentagon, military contractors and their staunch defenders on Capitol Hill.

George Bush understands *that* Iron Triangle, as indicated by his choice of John Tower as Secretary of Defense. Tower first served this war geometry in the Senate, where, as chair of the Armed Services Committee, he championed bloated budgets and ignored procurement reform. Then he cashed in as a consultant for seven firms, including Rockwell International and Martin Marietta. Securing the Pentagon appointment completes the hat trick.

Much of the fuss that preceded Bush's announcement focused on Tower's appetite for socialites and Scotch. True, his enthusiastic and highly paid ministrations to military contractors also appeared to pose an obstacle for a time. But the President-elect declared that the F.B.I. could find no evidence of criminal wrongdoing, and in Washington, where the real sleaze is usually legal, that's good enough.

The issue, of course, is not whether Tower can say no to women and wine but whether he can say no to the wild desires of his Pentagon pals and the arms makers. He seldom has. The prospect of Tower as Secretary of Defense gave pause even to some Bush advisers and a few of the more civic-minded military industrialists, like David Packard, head of the commission that recommended weapons procurement reforms. But Bush stuck with his fellow Texan and gave Tower free rein to name his own management team—ample proof that the isosceles squeeze continues.

REAGAN'S GRANDES PEURS
Christopher Hitchens

THE AUSTERITY AGENDA
Doug Henwood

A WORLD AT WAR
Robert Sollen

UNION DEMOCRACY
David Corn

THE CULTURE OF TV
Jackson Lears

GENDER AND HISTORY
Jane Caplan

AN INTERNATION STORY

FOUR TITANS CARVE UP EUROPEAN TV

WILLIAM FISHER AND MARK SCHAPIRO

When its economic borders disappear in 1992, Europe will become one of the largest television marketplaces in the world, embracing twelve countries and ten languages, a potential viewing population that easily rivals that of the United States. Thousands of bureaucrats are shifting into high gear to prepare for European integration, but the four kingpins of Europe's private television industry are occupied with matters that will likely have a more visible and immediate impact on homogenizing the Continent than the actions of any government agency. The four—a Czechoslovakian-born Briton, Robert Maxwell; an Australian-American, Rupert Murdoch; a German, Leo Kirch; and an Italian, Silvio Berlusconi—have been jostling for position around Europe's soon-to-be-deregulated television industry like animals around a water hole.

U.S. viewers long ago became accustomed to the free-for-all of privately owned television. CBS is owned by millionaire investor Laurence Tisch, NBC by the electronics and nuclear giant General Electric and ABC by a media conglomerate, Capital Cities. In Europe, however, television has traditionally been run by state-owned national monopolies. Though quality varies widely from country to country, these networks have shared at least the attribute of being a public service. But that has begun to change. "Until recently, national governments could control what was

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LETTERS.

FOND 'RECOLLECTIONS'

White Plains, N.Y.

Michael Rogin, in his review of Alger Hiss's *Recollections of a Life* ["Allegories of Alger," Sept. 26], affirms that one tie between Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers was that each, as a child, had had an older brother who committed suicide. The reviewer is in error. Hiss's elder brother, Bosley, died of Bright's disease the summer before Hiss entered law school, and Hiss took care of him that summer.

Rogin's review of Hiss's book is unconscionably long and extremely muddled. The reviewer seems to be trying in a clumsy way to keep on the good side of both the pro-Hiss and anti-Hiss forces. Hiss, he maintains, should not be punished for being a Communist or for anything he supposedly did in his role as a Communist, not even allegedly passing information to the Soviet Union. But, he concludes, it is now Hiss's inescapable duty to tell the American people just what he did when he (according to the reviewer) was a member of a Communist cell in Washington during the New Deal.

Why? If he was blameless, how is he obligated to say anything?

Hiss has been talked about ad infinitum, ad nauseam, but always in the context of the cold war. However, he seems to have been shaped and molded by not one, but two, very different cultures, both of which long preceded the cold war. His family came to Baltimore from Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century. Today, the entire South is being rapidly industrialized, but when Hiss was in his formative years, Baltimore had about it very much of the antebellum South, whose distinctive marks were hospitality and chivalry. When Chambers, looking for writing assignments, came to Washington with his wife and child, the Hisses had recently moved to a new apartment. But the lease on their old one had not run out, and it was standing vacant, so Hiss said the Chamberses might stay in the empty apartment at cost. This was what many people of Hiss's background would have done. Chambers, however, never paid a penny for the accommodation, and that was why Hiss dropped him.

If the antebellum South was one influence in shaping Hiss's conduct, there may have been an equally or possibly even stronger imprint left upon him by New England, where he went to prep school and law school and subsequently gained one of the coveted secretaryships to Justice Holmes. Perhaps because of the more severe climate, the New England culture was more demanding than that of the Old South. "Plain living and high thinking" was a frequently quoted motto, and it was taken for granted that people would shoulder responsibilities. Independent thinking, however, was not discouraged.

What reviewer Rogin failed to perceive in Hiss is that he is the product of these two very different cultures, and the two cultures bonded and thus gave him the strength to endure without losing his equilibrium—despite everything people like Senator McCarthy, Richard Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover and Whittaker Chambers could dream up in the way of assault.

Why does the Hiss case refuse to die? In the 1970s, Allen Weinstein, then a professor of history at Smith College, realized that many liberals were unhappy about a man being sent to jail on the evidence of Whittaker Chambers. Weinstein also realized that (a) if he could produce a book that, because it came from an academic, would be accepted as completely impersonal and (b) if this book ended by concluding that Hiss was guilty, the author would have a sure best seller. So Professor Weinstein published a volume titled *Perjury* that concluded that Hiss was guilty.

Victor Navasky got in touch with Weinstein and asked if he might come to see him and ask some questions. Weinstein agreed, but when Navasky got to his house, Mrs. Weinstein met him at the door and said the professor would not see him. However, she said, all of Weinstein's papers would be in the Truman Library by the end of the year. But all Weinstein sent to the Truman Library was a very small number of insignificant papers, though he had promised he would send all his notes and all the tapes of people with whom he had talked. The tapes in particular must be available if his book is to be given credence, but when the library wrote to him—more than once—about this omission, he never answered.

Hiss has the ability to get along with other human beings of many diverse stripes and conditions. That is why he was asked to organize the first meeting of the United Nations, in San Francisco, after the war. And it has been said that he would have made the greatest Secretary of State the United States could ever have had. In adversity, he did not change. When he was released from prison, where he had been for four years and some months, the windows on the prison facade were packed with convicts who cheered him to the echo. He is truly a man for all seasons.

When Hiss went to prison, his lawyer at that time, the late Chester Lane, did what nobody had previously thought of doing. He carefully scrutinized the famous typewriter that everyone agreed was what convicted Hiss. And Lane found that the typewriter was a fake. Its serial number was much too high for it to have been the Hiss machine, and a large number of the letters had had new typefaces soldered onto them, apparently in great haste. The prosecution, repeatedly calling the attention of both juries to the typewriter as proof of the defendant's guilt, knew it was a fake.

Lane appealed for a new trial on the basis of this and other new information, but the appeal was denied. Years later, after the Freedom of Information Act had been passed, new lawyers made a new appeal based on still further information, but a judge appointed by Nixon denied the appeal.

There is no further court to which the defendant can appeal. His little book of *Recollections*, however, has been described by two reviewers as "beautiful"—very possibly because in its quiet way it illustrates what Ernest Hemingway called "grace under pressure."

Margaret Halsey

IN RE MICHAEL ROGIN

New York City

I find it sad and nothing less than shameful that *The Nation*, which once, under the editorship of Carey McWilliams, devoted an entire issue marshaling evidence that Alger Hiss was victim of a frame-up [Sept. 21, 1957], should publish a review like Michael Rogin's "Allegories of Alger," which is disdainful of facts, devoid of common sense and lacking in simple decency.

At the core of Rogin's conjectures about Alger Hiss and the Hiss case is a preposterous notion: that Alger Hiss, by maintaining his innocence for forty years, has managed to carry out a charade, that of "the confidence man." This version (which, in my reading of his review, Rogin seems to prefer) is offered as the only possible counterpart to Hiss as victim. "One of these versions of the Hiss case is true and the other is false; it is as simple as that," says your reviewer, as if to suggest that a confidence man engages in his duplicity purely for the thrill of the scam. But, Michael Rogin's notion notwithstanding, a confidence man is someone who by fraud, after first having gained the victim's confidence, obtains money or property through a swindle.

What has Alger Hiss done to be designated—in the pages of *The Nation*, no less—as a likely confidence man? Over a span of more than four decades Hiss has attempted, at enormous cost and pain and anguish, to air the issues. In the face of this record—and in the face of the failure of the authorities to find one witness or a shred of evidence to corroborate the testimony of Hiss's sole accuser, an admitted liar and perjuror—it is the height of irresponsibility to suggest that Hiss's ongoing protestations of innocence have all been a sham, a sort of confidence-man scheme purportedly designed to reward the supposed schemer with a near lifetime of ordeals and hardships.

In positing Hiss as Dreyfus-like victim or confidence man, Rogin claims that his review "endorses neither version of the Hiss case." But such an assertion simply cannot be squared with Rogin's comments about the

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EDITORIALS.

Turnabout

Too much praise has been lavished on George Shultz, George Bush and Ronald Reagan for the historic decision to open talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization. The fact is, it had to happen sooner or later. Boxed in by the 1975 promise not to have contact with the P.L.O. (yet another blunder of Henry Kissinger's making), American policy-makers have had no choice but to bite their tongues for the past year. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union maneuvered among the Arab countries reaping advantage, and Jordan—the United States and Israel's favorite surrogate for the Palestinians—dropped out of the game.

Other contradicting interests no doubt have helped undermine the "special relationship" with Israel. Major American arms manufacturers have been angry at the pro-Israel lobby over its role in the loss of an $18 billion to $25 billion Saudi Arabian deal to the British in July. Israel's part in the

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Iran/*contra* scandal may also have made the once-burned U.S. Administration twice shy. A way for the United States to save face was needed, and hence the State Department, American Jewish emissaries, the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the P.L.O. danced their intricate and bewildering ballet to get Yasir Arafat to say the magic words.

Credit for the breakthrough must go first and foremost to the Palestinian *intifada*. The leaders and intellectuals of the Palestinian movement have been speaking of a two-state solution and coexistence with Israel for many years. But it was not until the massive and relatively nonviolent uprising of the past year that the P.L.O. could face its adversary with a semblance of power and parity. The insurgents of Jesse Jackson's campaign—including both Arab-Americans like James Zogby and Jewish progressives—also deserve credit. They responded to the Palestinians' moral claim and Israeli repression by convincing eight state Democratic Party conventions to pass resolutions supporting Palestinian self-determination; and ultimately, if inconclusively, they broke through the party's rote acquiescence in Israeli policies by raising the issue at the Democratic National Convention. Finally, the "renegades" of the Jewish community who dared to speak out, leaders like Rita Hauser and Stanley Sheinbaum and press organs like *Tikkun*, have played an important role in conveying the honest anxieties of American Jews, who seek a way to end the obsessive demonization of the Palestinians. The efforts of these independent forces and others too numerous to list, not any lame-duck wisdom, paved the way for Shultz's about-face.

Despite the dramatic developments in Geneva, much remains to be done. For one thing, the U.S. Administration still refuses to accept the Palestinians' right to struggle against the occupation or to establish an independent state. Care must be taken to prevent those issues from wrecking the U.S.-P.L.O. dialogue. Also, it is time to insist that Israel, too, renounce terrorism and affirm that it still considers United Nations Resolution 242 applicable: that is, that returning territories for peace is a fair trade.

Spurred no doubt by Shultz's shocker, Yitzhak Shamir finally cobbled together a national unity coalition government with the Labor Party—after more than seven weeks of discussions—committed above all to rejecting talks with the P.L.O. and derailing its growing legitimacy. Thus the role of the independent movements on the Israeli left now become crucial. Peace Now has already called for demonstrations designed to help open negotiations with the P.L.O., a position that should be championed in the United States. In truth, a small Palestinian state can be no serious threat to Israel's security, what with both superpowers bent on providing international guarantees and the Palestinians' willingness to confederate with Jordan after independence. The U.S. opening to the P.L.O. may be the dose of reality that Israel needs in order to make a more sober assessment of its situation. As Moshe Amirav, a former member of Likud who was expelled from the party's Central Committee for pursuing preliminary talks with P.L.O. supporters on the West Bank, told a *Tikkun*-sponsored gathering of 2,100 progressive American Jews recently, "Security does not equal keeping the territories. We have to give them back in order to get security."

Fox in the Coop

The attempt to abolish the Legal Services Corporation, the Federal agency that provides legal help for poor people, was a leading priority of the Reagan revolution. The Administration just about halved the agency's funds, sought to reduce its powers and flouted Congress by packing the agency's board of directors with recess appointees bent on its destruction. Now the board has elected as its chair the most unsavory of those appointees, Michael Wallace, a 37-year-old commercial lawyer from Jackson, Mississippi.

"He is the fox in the chicken coop," says Clint Lyons, executive director of the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association. "Michael Wallace mistakenly believes that legal services is part of the welfare state, when in effect it is part of our judicial system, carrying out a constitutional mandate."

Wallace, a lifelong Republican and former clerk for Chief Justice William Rehnquist, won notoriety in 1984 when his Senate confirmation hearings revealed that as a Congressional aide he had pushed for tax exemptions for segregated private schools and fought legislation broadening the Voting Rights Act. His term on the board expired a year and a half ago, but he continues to serve until a Bush appointee is confirmed by Congress. That could take a year or longer—plenty of time to make policy, Wallace said in an interview recently.

The Legal Services Corporation, founded under the Republican Administration of Gerald Ford in 1974, distributes Federal funds to 325 local programs representing an estimated 1.5 million poor people in noncriminal proceedings such as divorces, consumer complaints and landlord-tenant disputes. In 1981 the corporation barely managed to provide two lawyers for every 10,000 clients; its current $308 million annual budget supports only one lawyer for each 10,000. During the lean years, board members paid themselves five-figure consulting fees and attempted to bar local directors from bringing class action suits against the government—while also pressuring them not to talk to the press or elected officials.

Despite its status in the early 1980s as an ideological shibboleth, legal aid to the poor has had broad support throughout the Reagan era. Congress steadfastly rebuffed the President's annual exhortations to defund the corporation, and the courts have rejected attempts to bankrupt and restrict the powers of local programs. Finding a successor to Michael Wallace presents George Bush with a chance to distance himself from one of the Reagan revolution's most shameful assaults—on both the Constitution and fundamental decency.

JONATHAN GILL

Jonathan Gill is a writer based in New York City.

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VDT Radiation

"High Miscarriage Rates in High-Tech Office" is now a recurrent news story. The latest report—fourteen miscarriages in as many months at *USA Today*'s headquarters in Arlington, Virginia—is the sixteenth recorded cluster of problem pregnancies among women working at video display terminals. Although such groupings *could* be chance occurrences, convincing research shows that VDT-type radiation emissions harm animal embryos and that pregnant women working extensively at display terminals face an elevated risk of miscarriage.

Why is this potentially grave health hazard still not taken seriously? The most authoritative study of VDT reproductive hazards, by the California-based Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program, found a doubling of miscarriage rates for women working more than twenty hours a week at VDTs when compared with women who did not use the machines. The results of this 1,583-woman study reinforce a series of laboratory findings from around the world that showed radiation-caused damage to chicken embryos and mouse fetuses.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Niosh), which has investigated several miscarriage clusters since 1983, albeit inconclusively, is conducting its own large-scale study of women who work with VDTs. Unfortunately, its research plan is designed to determine only whether an association exists between VDT work and miscarriages, a link already shown by the Kaiser study and earlier ones. The question that needs an answer now is whether radiation, stress or some other factor is causing the miscarriages, but the Niosh study does not ask it.

In 1980, soon after the first problem-pregnancy cluster was reported among workers at the Toronto *Star*, American unions began pressing employers and Federal authorities to investigate the potential hazards posed by VDTs. What eventually emerged was an approach that stressed, first, collective bargaining where workers were organized, and second, corrective legislation, which has been introduced in about half the states since 1981. Because computerization affects work pace, privacy and, ultimately, managerial authority over work, labor tried to seize the VDT issue as a front-line engagement in the fight for control of the computerized workplace. But despite considerable legislative and media attention, the VDT issue has faded from the national labor agenda as businesses and the computer industry have spent millions to stymie the movement.

The major exception has been a battle initiated by an aggressive local of the Communications Workers of America in Suffolk County, New York, where the county legislature approved a VDT law with moderate restrictions in 1988. It requires properly designed chairs, work stations and lighting for all employees working more than twenty-six hours weekly in offices with twenty or more terminals. In addition, those VDT users are entitled to fifteen-minute rest breaks, annual eye exams and eyeglasses, if necessary, at the employers' expense. Unfortunately, like most of the legislation that has been introduced nationwide, the Suffolk measure ignored the reproductive hazard question.

Suffolk County employers had opposed the bill by threatening to leave the county and, after it passed, by filing suit to stop its implementation. In October the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court upheld the injunction they succeeded in getting, but it blocks only the eye care provisions while the suit is pending. Meanwhile, labor has picked up surprisingly little statewide or nationwide momentum from the Suffolk victory. The national unions historically out in front on VDT safety—the Newspaper Guild, the Service Employees International Union, the Communications Workers of America and the 9to5 National Association of Working Women—are inexplicably cool to the issue.

That is true despite the fact that, while the question of reproductive risks remains unsettled, other, less severe problems are better understood. Research over the past decade has found consistently that VDT users are more likely than others to suffer back, neck and upper-arm problems, as well as headaches and, less commonly, an increased incidence of leg pain and debilitating wrist injuries. Studies also have shown higher rates of visual problems among VDT users. Moreover, stress—which Niosh recognizes as one of the top ten occupational dangers—is higher among computer users than among other types of office workers.

Not surprisingly, as more managers and executives use computers they have become more responsive to workers' complaints. Still, most employers (and the computer industry) advocate a case-by-case resolution of what they consider not a health but a comfort problem. Radiation hazards are routinely dismissed, often on the basis of inaccurate information supplied by the Center for Office Technology, an industry group. Fear of liability has spurred a small number of employers to make some changes, such as providing non-VDT work during pregnancy. But most remain resistant to changes that cost money, even though a recent study by a Miami University of Ohio professor showed that improvements in VDT working conditions yield a net benefit from productivity gains.

Given the research funding shortages due to more pressing health crises, VDT reproductive risks will not be properly investigated anytime soon. An ambitious but expensive study proposed by researchers at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York City is on hold because an initial request for Federal money was turned down. Radiation research funding is scarce as well.

There are 30 million good reasons to get answers to the questions that persist about VDT work and health: That is approximately the number of Americans using computers daily, millions of whom are women of childbearing age.

MARK A. PINSKY

Mark A. Pinsky is executive director of the New York City–based Democracy Project and contributing editor to VDT News: The VDT Health and Safety Report.

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Two widely disparate events have marked, for me, the terminus of the Reagan era. The first was George Shultz's admission—grudging and incomplete, unsatisfactory in several respects but an admission nonetheless—of the Palestinians' right to exist. The second was the publication of Susan Sontag's essay *AIDS and Its Metaphors*.

Surveying Reagan's eight grotesque years in office with the advantages of retrospect, one can discern a deftly managed series of *grandes peurs*. The *grande peur* in earlier centuries was a panic or collective hallucination that arose spontaneously to seize and sicken the masses. Events such as the "Popish Plot" hysteria in England or the "tulipomania" of speculation in worthless Dutch bulbs might fall into this category. In our more advanced epoch, the *grande peur* need not just be exploited by unscrupulous politicians. It can actually be invented and managed by them.

The Reaganites instigated five minor *grandes peurs* and two big, overarching ones. The minor cases were the Libyan "hit squad," the K.G.B. conspiracy to kill the Pope, the Soviet use of "yellow rain," the downing of K.A.L. Flight 007 and the Sandinistas' "export of revolution." The major ones were the "Evil Empire" and "Terrorism," whether denominated as "state-supported" or "international." Various filiations obviously connected the large to the small; the hasty search for "patterns" is an essential element in the inflation of a *grande peur*.

Great fears, properly fanned, can get people to do the oddest things. Under the influence of these ludicrous and transparent urgings, Americans canceled vacations in Western Europe in the summer of 1986, convinced that "terrorists" lurked swarthily near every cafe and cathedral. Meanwhile, respectable professionals in the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department were coolly forging evidence to "prove" that the civil war in El Salvador, which had begun years before the Nicaraguan revolution, had been started by the Sandinistas. On other fronts, major newspapers gave their pages to fabricated composite drawings of a Libyan-sponsored team supposedly already on American soil and sworn to take the life of our beloved leader.

The press and the academy come out of this period of orchestrated unease looking very shabby. Most of the state-sponsored disinformation, particularly as it applied to Libya, was reprinted uncritically. And a number of tame scientists and other "experts" lent themselves to the "yellow rain" campaign, which purported to show the Russians waging chemical warfare. It took a lot of patient work, in the face of many accusations of "appeasement" and "useful idiocy," to show that the clouds of yellow particles were made up of the excrement of migrating bees. (See Peter Pringle, "Political Science," *The Atlantic*, October 1985.)

It now seems a long time since there were TV specials and front-page exclusives about the so-called Bulgarian connection, but the allegation that the K.G.B. had conspired to kill the Pope was an inspired piece of Reaganite atmospherics, ideally suited to the creation of a hothouse of paranoia. Where are they now? I know what's happened to Michael Ledeen, but I've lost track of the intrepid Claire Sterling. Once they were on the front page of *The New York Times*, with Sterling herself engaged as the reporter of her own theory.

It doesn't matter what you think happened to K.A.L. 007. Whatever the truth may be, it can now be stated with confidence that everything said by the Administration was a lie. The allegation that the Russians knowingly, callously shot down a civilian airliner, as claimed by Jeane Kirkpatrick before the United Nations and Ronald Reagan before the cameras, was known to be untrue when it was made, and was considered a necessary lie in order to fuel the arms buildup and to vindicate the image of the Evil Empire. The crudity of the propaganda was, horribly enough, the clue to its success. Have you forgotten Mario Cuomo refusing landing rights in New York to Andrei Gromyko? Have you forgotten the great Stolichnaya boycott of 1983?

It's almost insulting to waste words on the Nicaragua *grande peur*, but the fact is that Ronald Reagan's mendacious ravings on television, alleging a Sandinista threat to the Texas border town of Harlingen and to the peaceable republic beyond, had the long-term effect of convincing Congress and *The Washington Post* that the *contras* were worth at least a bit of "humanitarian" aid. The attachment of the word "humanitarian" to the murderous rabble commanded by the scourings of the Somoza regime was one of the great psychological successes of the whole crazy period, just as the febrile adulation for the paranoid figure of Oliver North was its psychological climax.

And of course, round the clock, the deafening repetition of the word "terror," coupled with the word "Palestinian." Unintentionally, this bombardment recalled one *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the word "terrorist," which is:

> One who entertains, professes, or tries to awaken or spread a feeling of terror or alarm; an alarmist, a scaremonger.

In *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, by contrast, a serious person reflects on a genuine crisis, and refuses all the authorial temptations of sensation. The book is an exercise in compression and restraint, even limitation. It insists on proper definition. One of its pleas concerns a favorite of *grande peur* politicians: the image of society itself as a diseased body. This, says Sontag, is

> dangerous and far-reaching in its consequences, since it not only provides a persuasive justification for authoritarian rule but implicitly suggests the necessity of state-sponsored repression and violence (the equivalent of surgical removal or chemical control of the offending or "unhealthy" parts of the body politic).

It is this sober, rational tone that has been so lacking in the past eight years' feast of unreason, the aim of which was to militarize our minds and to condition us to react calmly to the death of strangers.

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ARTICLES.

THE AUSTERITY AGENDA

Have We Really Been Bingeing?

DOUG HENWOOD

The party's over; now it's time to face the hangover. That is the conventional wisdom of Washington, Wall Street and the moneyed classes worldwide. The Reagan era was a collective binge by consumers and the Federal government that debilitated the economy, and the only known cure is an extended round of belt-tightening. But have we been on a binge? Who are *we*, anyway? And is the proposed cure—a half-decade of austerity—worse than the disease? In fact, could an austerity agenda push the economy off a cliff?

The conventional wisdom was succinctly articulated by former Federal Reserve chair Paul Volcker in his November 30 testimony before the floundering National Economic Commission (N.E.C.). "We have to pay for the binge," warned the retired money mandarin. He said that the Federal deficit must shrink by $30 billion to $40 billion a year for the next four or five years, and consumers will have to settle for little or no increase in living standards during that period. Spending must be cut and taxes, preferably on consumption, must rise. Otherwise, panic will seize the world's financial markets, thus delivering the doom so frightfully previewed on Black Monday in October 1987. Only this time the panic won't be confined to the financial sector: Bondholders will riot and foreign creditors will liquidate their U.S. assets, driving up our interest rates, which will promptly send the real economy into, as Volcker put it, "the kind of recession that would be most difficult to handle."

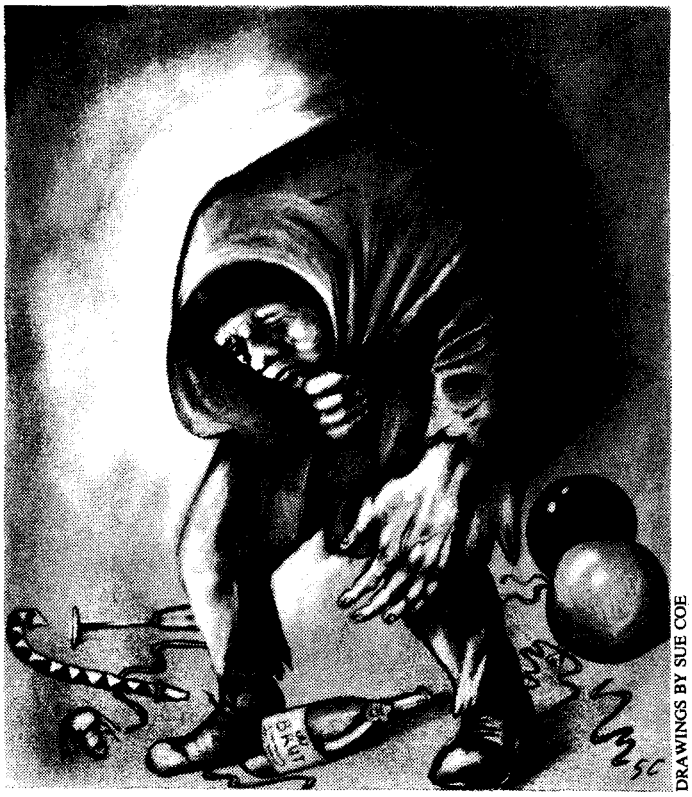
There is every reason to believe that the current Fed chair, Alan Greenspan, agrees with Volcker, though he favors spending cuts over tax increases, fearing that a profligate Congress would only waste the new revenue on fresh spending schemes. Greenspan told the N.E.C., the preferred forum of the austerity coalition, that failure to make the required cuts "courts a dangerous corrosion of our economy."

Foreign central bankers agree. Only hours after the polls here closed November 8, the Bank of Japan (BoJ) issued a report urging the United States to slash, and slash quickly. As Ian Rodger noted in the London *Financial Times*, the BoJ's report was "remarkable not only for the timing of its release but also for the bluntness of its message." Out of presumed respect for George Bush's readable lips, the report was quiet on the matter of taxes; it urged instead that it is of "prime importance" to cut spending. The BoJ was happy to see the deficits declining—thanks to a cooling in military spending and buoyant economic growth—but rued the lack of progress on "transfer payments," i.e., Social Security. In the eyes of finance, cutting Social Security would have a doubly happy effect: It would cut government spending and personal consumption in a single stroke, since pensioners spend most of their income. Or, as the BoJ put it, "The impact of restrained transfer payments on personal consumption hereafter is of vital concern."

Now, it will come as news to the homeless, impoverished single mothers, dispossessed farmers and former automobile workers that the nation has been on a bender. And a look at the actual numbers refutes the Volcker-Greenspan-BoJ analysis. During the Reagan boom, roughly the years 1983-88, real (inflation-adjusted) personal consumption grew by 3.9 percent. This is little different from the 3.8 percent average that prevailed during the headiest years of the American Century, 1946 through 1973, and below the 4 percent level of the business expansion that ran from 1976 to 1979.

International comparisons are not terribly damning, either. Throughout the Reagan boom, personal consumption in the United States grew more slowly than in Britain and Canada, and more slowly than the overall G.N.P. This is a distinction we share with only one other of the big seven economies—Japan's, everyone's favorite paragon of Victorian thrift. (The big seven are Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Britain, the United States and West Germany.) For 1987 and 1988, consumption growth in the United States has been slower than in all big seven economies but France's. This is hardly the picture of a binge.

That's not to say things are hunky-dory as we enter the post-Reagan era. Yet the problem isn't so much that "we"



DRAWINGS BY SUE COE

Doug Henwood is editor of Left Business Observer *and writes frequently on finance and economics for* The Nation.

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have consumed too much but that too little of what we consume is produced here—thus the huge and persistent trade deficit. The problem isn't really that the government has been running large deficits but that the red ink has been wasted on a military buildup and tax cuts for those least in need of relief. And the problematic debt isn't so much the government's as that of the private sector, especially business debt.

First, take the trade deficit. Of course we can't go on like this, importing far more than we export and borrowing the difference. But how did the gap get so big? Mainstream analysts reflexively blame the budget deficit, which is a half-truth at best. The budget deficit contributed to the trade deficit only insofar as it made our economy grow faster than that of many of our trading partners in Europe and Latin America. Is this entirely a bad thing? Do we want an economy as sluggish as West Germany's, with its 8.5 percent unemployment rate? And fiscal orthodoxy itself is no guarantee of a balanced trade account: Margaret Thatcher's Britain suffers a trade deficit larger than ours, relative to G.N.P., despite having a virtually balanced budget.

A serious analysis of the trade deficit would have to raise some very unpleasant questions about our corporations, something most economic observers are reluctant to do, given their intimate relations with big business. U.S. multinationals have chosen not to compete with the Japanese in consumer electronics; there's just no such thing as a domestic videocassette recorder. Though General Electric would be quite capable of designing and building its own VCRs, it chose to buy them from Japanese suppliers instead. (General Electric has since sold its entire consumer electronics operation to Thomson Electric, a French firm, which is still using the G.E. name.)

U.S. workers are also quite capable of making computer chips, but management prefers low-wage labor in Singapore or Malaysia. Although the government doesn't collect such statistics, private economists estimate that one-third to one-half of our trade deficit is the result of U.S.-based multinationals importing goods from foreign subsidiaries or subcontractors. (Management consultant Peter Drucker estimates that as much as one-third of world trade consists of intrafirm transfers.) Profligate consumers and irresponsible public spending can't be blamed for these trends.

In fact, all this talk of "binges" is a covert attempt to solidify the heritage of Reaganism: the military buildup, the war on the welfare state and the upward distribution of income. Those in the austerity crowd typically suggest only cosmetic reductions in the military; they don't seem to care that all but the richest fifth of Americans have seen real income fall over the past decade, or that the Federal tax system, even after the 1986 reform, is still less progressive than it was in 1977. No, their prime worry is the budget deficit.

And such obsessing about the deficit plays right into the Gipper's hands. Allan H. Ryskind, editor of the conservative magazine *Human Events* (a Reagan favorite), told *The New York Times* recently that the deficit "has certainly put a lid on the welfare state. The Democrats have sort of trapped themselves because they've said this is all terrible and horrible and that closing the deficit should be the first priority." Only a weird coalition of unreconstructed Keynesians, unrepentant supply-siders and occasional radical journalists dissent from this agenda.

By any number of classic signs, the Reagan boom is beginning to look a little ragged; despite the New Age economists who think the business cycle is a thing of the past, it's a reasonable guess that a recession will arrive within the next year. (This impression is reinforced by the fact that downturns have a mysterious way of occurring early in a Republican President's term; this happened in 1953, 1957, 1969, 1973 and 1981.) So cutting the deficit, even over a period of several years, when the economy is about to sink of its own weight, could turn an ordinary recession into a killer.

The risks of fiscal prudence are intensified by the massive and unprecedented buildup in consumer and corporate debt throughout the Reagan boom: A round of layoffs could quickly drive countless households over the financial edge, and a spot of economic weakness could bankrupt countless overleveraged firms. An economic program to redistribute income from rich to nonrich would act as a wondrous antidote to these deflationary risks, but hardly anyone makes such Keynesian arguments anymore. It's a measure of how far right the spectrum of elite discourse has shifted that even the mildly reformist Keynes is considered *outré*.

Whatever Congress does, the unelected economic planners of the Federal Reserve Board have begun to carry out the austerity agenda. Fed monetary policy, already rather stingy, is getting tighter. Aside from the brief period of loosened credit just after the Black Monday stock market crash, interest rates have been trending higher and money supply growth lower since early 1987. (By one measure, Fed credit to the banking sector, monetary policy is almost as tight as it was in the tightest days of Volckerism in late 1981 and early 1982.) The Fed is being very stingy about accommodating Christmas cash and credit needs, and it is apparently reluctant to satisfy the demand for credit fired by the current corporate takeover mania. The latter, while a good thing in principle, has the unfortunate side effect of raising interest rates for everyone else.

Congressional Democrats, in their eagerness to turn the alleged people's party into a Tory party, question neither the Fed's stinginess, the urgency of deficit-cutting nor the priorities of Federal spending. Shifting, say, $75 billion out of the military budget and into education, public housing, Aid to Families with Dependent Children and other social programs would do far more economic good than raising the gasoline tax and cutting Social Security ever could. And what makes economic sense is also, in this case, the right thing to do. Whether Congress will act on this happy coincidence is another matter entirely. □

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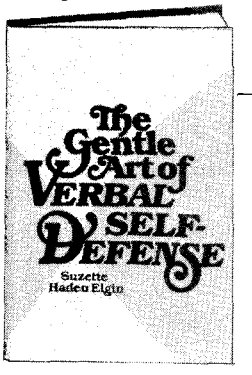
About the Author

Psycholinguist Suzette Haden Elgin has presented her innovative self-defense principles in a variety of formats. She has given workshops and seminars all over the U.S., including verbal self-defense sessions for doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Dr. Elgin has also created a self-defense tape and a training manual for people who teach her self-defense techniques.



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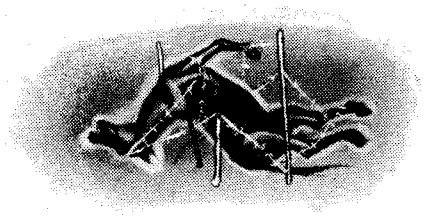

A World at War

ROBERT SOLLEN

"The bipolar world of the post-World War II era, with two dominant superpowers and largely subservient allies, is gone."
—From American Agenda, *a report presented November 20 to President-elect George Bush by former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.*

The euphoria over improved U.S.-Soviet relations and the rush of headlines about superpower cooperation in resolving "regional conflicts" in Afghanistan, southern Africa, Southeast Asia and even, perhaps, Central America, suggest that a new and more peaceful age has dawned. But a study of current conflicts by a group of researchers at the Santa Barbara Peace Resource Center in California shows that peace is not quite breaking out all over. Much of the world continues to be afflicted by civil wars, ethnic uprisings, neighborhood and state terrorism and government brutality. But as former Presidents Carter and Ford recognize, it is no longer possible—if it ever was—to find security by "standing up to the Soviet threat." The threat lies elsewhere.

To help determine where efforts for peace should now be concentrated, the Santa Barbara group compiled a list of current wars. We wanted to find out who was fighting and what they were fighting about. We counted thirty-two wars in progress in 1988.

Definitions are problematic: What constitutes a war? When does one party's civil war become another's national liberation struggle? Our table (opposite) does not pretend to be exhaustive. It does not, for example, include some cases in which brutal regimes, such as those of Iran, Zambia or Haiti, have recently killed large numbers of their own citizens. It also excludes the conflict in Cyprus, the Chad-Libya hostilities and the war between Israel and the Arab states, which are currently dormant. Moreover, how does one fix when a conflict finally ends? It is one thing for the superpowers at a negotiating table to declare that a settlement has been reached. But will peace come to Afghanistan when the last Soviet soldier leaves? Or to Angola if Jonas Savimbi's Unita remains in the field? Or, most nightmarish of all, to Cambodia if the Khmer Rouge should return to power after the Vietnamese withdraw?

Only one of the wars on our list is a classic international shooting match: the Iran-Iraq war, which reached a cease-fire last August but still awaits a formal peace treaty. Foreign powers are involved in roughly one-third of the wars now under way, though not in actual combat save the Soviet Union, which is due to complete its withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 15.

With the exception of Northern Ireland and, arguably, South Africa, each of the wars in our study involves Third World nations, which thus compound the misery of their people by supporting devastating military operations. Industrialized nations supply most of the arms, at astronomical cost.

Twenty-five of the thirty-two conflicts have a significant ethnic, racial or religious dimension. In some cases, such as the war of the Tamils against the Sri Lankan government, it is the primary cause of hostilities; in others—Peru, Guatemala, the Philippines—it is one of several elements. Add to that the many ethnic and racial protests that have not yet become shooting wars. In many diverse cultures those both in and out of power refuse to set aside the uncompromising ideology of the true believer. Isolating, annihilating or degrading the "infidel," the "inferior" or the "enemy other" is still frequently part of religious or government policy.

Squandering resources on Stealth bombers, Star Wars or nuclear weapons is utterly irrelevant to the problems of conflict that exist in the world of 1989. The Soviet Union appears to be becoming more aware of this than either the waning or the waxing U.S. Administration. There is opportunity as well as shock in seeing the world as it is.

Millions of citizens now understand that America's future depends on correcting national and international debt problems, industrial stagnation, the growing gap between rich and poor, a deteriorating educational system, the spread of homelessness, increasingly inaccessible health care, a shameful infant mortality rate (the United States ranks eighteenth among all nations), a faltering infrastructure and the many potentially catastrophic global environmental trends that threaten the atmosphere, soil, oceans, water supply and forests.

The United States quit Vietnam. It has signed a nuclear weapons reduction agreement, the first in history, with the Soviet Union. It has used the tools of diplomacy to bring a settlement to the Angolan civil war and place Namibia on the road to independence. The United States and the Soviet Union have done some things right lately—not everything, and still not much—but it's a start. George Bush now has an opportunity, not to stand up to Gorbachev but to sit down with him. Together, they could not only achieve a greatly improved relationship between their own nations but help end the fighting that rages elsewhere. There are at least thirty-two places they could start. □

Robert Sollen is a retired reporter for the Santa Barbara News-Press *and a member of the board of directors of the Santa Barbara Peace Resource Center.* *Additional research was done by Amy Langenberg and Robert Nathan.*

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	CIVIL ONLY	CIVIL/ INTERNATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL ONLY	RELIGIOUS/ ETHNIC	U.N. INVOLVED	SUPERPOWER INVOLVED	TOTAL DEATHS*
ASIA							
Afghanistan	●			●	●	●	1 million since 1979
Burma	●						6,000 since 1985
Cambodia		●			●	●	2.2 million since 1970
China–Tibet	●						1.2 million since 1956
India	●			●			5,000 since 1984
Indonesia–East Timor		●		●			100,000 since 1975
Philippines	●			●		●	35,000 since 1972
Sri Lanka		●		●			10,000 since 1983
AFRICA							
Angola		●		●	●	●	213,000 since 1975
Burundi	●			●			5,000+ in 1988
Ethiopia–Eritrea		●		●		●	546,000 since 1974
Ethiopia–Other	●			●			ca. 500,000 since 1974
Morocco–Western Sahara		●		●	●	●	10,000 since 1975
Mozambique		●		●	●		400,000+ since 1981
Namibia		●		●	●		25,000 since 1966
South Africa	●			●	●		3,000 since 1985
Somalia	●						ca. 25,000 in 1988
Sudan	●			●			100,000+ since 1984
Uganda	●			●			102,000 since 1981
LATIN AMERICA							
Colombia	●					●	4,000 since 1986
El Salvador	●					●	65,000 since 1979
Guatemala	●			●			138,000 since 1966
Nicaragua		●				●	65,000 since 1978
Peru	●			●			15,000 since 1980
MIDDLE EAST							
Iran–Iraq			●	●	●		ca. 400,000 since 1980
Iran/Iraq–Kurds		●		●			205,000 since 1976
Israel/Lebanon/Syria	●	●		●	●	●	152,000 since 1975
Lebanon	●			●			
Turkey–Kurds		●		●			3,500 since 1980
West Bank/Gaza Strip		●		●		●	400+ since 1987
OTHER							
Armenia/Azerbaijan	●			●		●	ca. 245 in 1988
Northern Ireland		●		●			3,000 since 1969

* Source: Ruth Leger-Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1987-88*, updated with information from Asia Watch, Americas Watch, Africa Watch, Cultural Survival, various U.N. agencies and press reports.

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DAVID VS. GOLIATH

Struggling for Union Democracy

DAVID CORN

Glenn Berrien and Marion Wright couldn't keep in their chairs. As they spoke, they angrily paced their roomy office in downtown Washington. "They say give up our organization or we'll fight you for it," exclaimed Berrien, a former dockworker and now the 32-year-old director of the National Post Office Mail Handlers Union. The target of his wrath was the Laborers' International Union of North America (Liuna), of which the Mail Handlers is a division. Wright, the Mail Handlers' financial officer and another former dockhand, is twelve years older than Berrien and a little less refined. He shouted, "We won't sit back and be kicked in the ass."

They were in a union headquarters truly divided. Two-thirds of the dozen or so rooms in the suite are claimed by staff members who take their orders from Liuna, an A.F.L.-C.I.O. affiliate numbering about 400,000 unskilled or semiskilled laborers who generally perform the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs at construction sites. The Mail Handlers represents 43,000 postal workers, mainly those who do the heavy lifting—loading and unloading sacks of mail. Berrien and Wright are spearheading a campaign to attain greater autonomy for their union. On Berrien's desk sat a proposed new Constitution for the Mail Handlers, which, if adopted, would wrest authority from Liuna and increase the power of the Mail Handlers' rank and file.

The union's attempt to rewrite its Constitution is just another chapter in a bitter, years-long struggle between it and Liuna—a feud marked by competing charges of financial impropriety, the indictment of Berrien's predecessor, accusations of racism (Berrien and Wright are black) and a pending lawsuit over control of the Mail Handlers. But this is more than just a clash of two factions. The fight is also about union democracy and the right to challenge union leadership. Both sides try hard to spin the complex story their way. Liuna maintains it is a parent union acting properly to preserve the integrity of a division run by irresponsible officials. Advocates of the Mail Handlers portray the battle as David versus Goliath: a small, awakening union, led by officials attuned to its members' needs, rising up against a powerful and domineering international linked to the mob.

In 1986 the President's Commission on Organized Crime labeled Liuna "a union with clear ties to organized crime." It charged that Angelo Fosco, the union's current president, met with members of Chicago's Cosa Nostra in the 1960s and has named mobsters to union leadership posts. (Fosco, a member of the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s executive council, is renowned as a do-nothing labor leader, famous for keeping his mouth shut during A.F.L.-C.I.O. meetings.) In 1981, Fosco himself was indicted for allegedly participating in an

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organized crime kickback scheme involving union funds. He was eventually acquitted, but the commission reported that "there is little chance that the Liuna membership will be able to eliminate organized crime's influence, or control their union, if the current leadership . . . remains intact." In the past six months, Liuna officials in New Jersey and New York have been indicted for mob-connected racketeering. Fosco did not respond to requests for an interview.

Relations between Liuna and the Mail Handlers have been strained since the two unions initiated merger talks in 1968. But the present troubles began, by Berrien's account, when the international tried to raise its share of the Mail Handlers' monthly dues in 1985. "We had the feeling that the Laborers were just milking us, taking the per capita and doing nothing," says George Baker, now president of Mail Handlers Local 300 in New York City. According to Berrien, thirty-five of the thirty-seven local presidents voted not to pay the increase; in return, Liuna refused to approve a Constitution with minor reforms passed at the Mail Handlers' 1984 convention.

The dues issue sparked a Mail Handlers revolt. At a March 1985 meeting of local presidents in Las Vegas, there was talk of an "amicable disaffiliation," Baker said. Disaffiliation is high treason in the labor movement. "The shit hit the fan, and the Laborers went after the Mail Handlers," recalled one labor lawyer familiar with the episode. By the end of that year, the Mail Handlers were in a court-approved trusteeship—that is, Liuna took total control of the division. For two years, Louis Elesie, a Liuna official, ran the Mail Handlers as its trustee. But labor law limits the term of trusteeships to eighteen months, so in December 1987 the Mail Handlers were able to elect new officers to run their own union. Delegates to a national convention picked Herbert Walker, then president of the Cincinnati local, as national director and Marion Wright as financial officer.

"Prior to the convention . . . Elesie made what he thought was a friendly comment to me," Baker recalled. "He said, 'Everybody in Washington wants to know why you're backing a black man'"—meaning Walker, who was seen as independent of Liuna. Baker sent a letter to Mail Handlers members around the country publicizing the exchange. Elesie would not return telephone calls, but a lawyer for the international denied that Elesie had made the remark, which the Mail Handlers saw as a manifestation of the racial tension underlying the conflict. Liuna's membership is estimated to be 50 to 65 percent nonwhite, but its leadership is predominantly white. Most Mail Handlers national officials are black.

Not surprisingly, the transition was not easy. The new officers and Liuna collided over numerous financial issues. The Mail Handlers, for instance, charged that Liuna owed them hundreds of thousands of dollars; Liuna vehemently disagreed. The Mail Handlers' attempt to gain control over collective bargaining with the U.S. Postal Service was rebuffed by Liuna's Fosco. And, indeed, papers subsequently filed by Liuna in the lawsuit did show that the Mail Handlers had previously recognized that ultimate responsibility for collective bargaining—the lifeblood of any union—rested with Liuna. But the Mail Handlers now argued, with reason, that it should control this critical function. Moreover, its new administration believed Liuna had done a poor job in the last round of contract talks, accepting a paltry 1.6 percent pay hike.

The Mail Handlers' lucrative health plan was also an issue. With premiums of more than $1 billion and an enrollment of about 500,000 workers, it is the second largest plan in the Federal sector. (Nonunion members, who pay annual dues of $30 to become associate members, account for more than 90 percent of the participants.) "Ultimately, that's what they [Liuna] want—the health plan—because of the money it generates," Wright charged. In fact, toward the end of the trusteeship Elesie, who had been appointed by Fosco, signed a potentially profitable two-year contract on behalf of the Mail Handlers with the law firm of Robert Connerton, retaining the firm for the health plan. Connerton is Liuna's general counsel and a major power in the union. When the Mail Handlers' new officers later tried to replace Connerton's firm as the health plan's legal representative, Fosco ordered them not to.

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One Liuna official, who would talk only if promised anonymity, denied that control of the health plan was a chief issue in the conflict. "The allegation is that this is a great grab on the part of the international," he said. "The historical fact is that since 1968, when the plan came into effect, it was structured by an international staff representative and built up by him—without the Mail Handlers involved." He claimed that Herbert Walker, who later was indicted for criminal acts committed prior to becoming the Mail Handlers' director, tried to snatch control of collective bargaining and the health plan purely for his own gain.

Last spring, negotiations aimed at ending the intra-union brawl began, with Kircher and Phalen, a Cincinnati labor-law firm, representing the Mail Handlers. According to Walker, Berrien and Wright, at an April 29 meeting a Kircher and Phalen partner reported that Robert Connerton had suggested a deal: If his Washington law firm was given the legal work for the health plan, other issues could be resolved in the Mail Handlers' favor. In effect, they were accusing Connerton, a major figure in the labor movement whose firm had collected nearly $1 million from Liuna in 1987, of both coercion and engaging in a blatant conflict of interest. Connerton would not talk on the record for this article, but Kircher and Phalen has denied it passed along any such offer. Minutes of the April 29 meeting, however, note that Thomas Kircher did brief the Mail Handlers on the negotiations with Connerton. They also indicate Liuna was willing to transfer contract administration to the Mail Handlers, "with stipulations," but wanted "total control of Health Plan (with their Attorney's being the adviser)" and other concessions.

The negotiations produced no peace. On June 16, the Mail Handlers' Walker was indicted by a Federal grand jury on charges of embezzling nearly $100,000 while serving as president of Local 304 in Cincinnati between 1983 and 1985. On June 20 the division received a letter from Fosco suspending Walker and imposing an "emergency investigatory supervision" of the union, with Elesie back as "supervisor." The division granted Walker a leave of absence and appointed Berrien to fill the vacancy. Four days later the dispute hit the courts, when Liuna sought judicial enforcement of the supervision and won a temporary restraining order that, in effect, put Liuna in charge of the Mail Handlers. On July 28, Federal District Court Judge Oliver Gasch ruled against Liuna's request for a preliminary injunction. "More than anything else," he noted, "this case represents a power struggle between Laborers' International and . . . the Mail Handlers' Division." He questioned whether the indictment of Walker constituted a true "emergency" and added that the Mail Handlers' efforts to achieve democratic reforms had been thwarted "by the total financial control" Liuna sought. Gasch's decision led to an order freeing the Mail Handlers' bank account, which had been taken over by Liuna. Still under Liuna control, however, were contract administration and the health plan.

In June the Mail Handlers picketed Liuna headquarters. The July issue of the Mail Handlers' quarterly magazine ran an all-out assault on the parent organization. It assailed Liuna's "greed," raised the issue of alleged mob connections and detailed a complicated set of charges involving the relationships between Liuna, former Postmaster General Preston Tisch and a company that administers the health plan, a firm that is controlled by Tisch and his brother, CBS corporate mogul Laurence Tisch. These allegations focused on the 1987 contract talks, when Liuna, rather than negotiating jointly with other postal unions, agreed on its own to the 1.6 percent raise for the Mail Handlers. This move had weakened the bargaining position of the other unions and benefited Preston Tisch, by keeping postal labor costs down.

The 1987 contract also contained language changes. In sections on grievances and arbitrations, the Mail Handlers' representative was changed from the "National President of the Union"—meaning the head of the Mail Handlers—to the "General President of the Laborers International Union of North America or his designee." The Mail Handlers were understandably angered by this, since grievance arbitration is a major link between a union's officers and the rank and file.

The Mail Handlers, charging that their union is the victim of some Tisch-Liuna conspiracy, point to the fact that five months after the Liuna–Postal Service negotiations, Elesie, the Liuna-selected trustee, renewed a contract with Continental Assurance Corporation to continue underwriting the $1 billion health plan. C.A.C. is a subsidiary of C.N.A. Financial Corporation, 80 percent of which is owned by the Tisch brothers. The Mail Handlers' plan accounts for 90 to 95 percent of C.A.C.'s business. In 1986, C.A.C. received $52.6 million in administrative expenses and made $5 million in profit processing claims for the plan.

The Postal Inspection Service, the investigative branch of the Postal Service, is currently trying to determine if the postal negotiations were tainted by the Tisch-C.A.C.-Liuna connection, according to one investigator. Tisch, who served as Postmaster General from 1986 to 1988, recused himself from all postal matters related to C.N.A. "I had nothing to do with C.N.A. business," he told the *Federal Times*. Yet postal inspectors who examined Tisch's telephone records discovered that he made numerous calls to the offices of C.A.C. while he was Postmaster General, an investigator said. "I don't know if it proves anything," he noted, "but it looks bad on the face." Asked about the inquiry, Tisch called it "a crock of shit." He had no comment regarding his phone calls to C.A.C.

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In such a generally combative atmosphere, it must be hard to run a union. Nevertheless, in November the Mail Handlers held a constitutional convention in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The 175 delegates approved a greatly revised Constitution, accepting practically all the changes advocated by Berrien, Wright and the other reformers. One characteristic amendment places authority to negotiate with the Postal Service squarely in the hands of the Mail Handlers, not Liuna. The convention also passed a number of resolutions. One urges the Postal Service to offer child care services; another decries drug testing; a third requires the union to hold seminars for locals on mob infiltration of the labor movement. A resolution calling on the union to poll its members on whether to remain affiliated with Liuna failed in a close vote, 47.1 to 48 percent.

The new Constitution, which calls for elections of national officers in January, boosts the power of the rank and file. For the first time, national officers will be selected by direct vote of the membership—if, that is, the elections ever take place. After the November convention, Liuna president Fosco claimed that none of the Mail Handlers' constitutional reforms can take effect until approved by Liuna—including the provision for rank-and-file balloting. Under the previous Constitution, Liuna was given the last word on all amendments. At the Mail Handlers convention, that was the first clause to be amended. But Fosco argued that even that change is subject to Liuna's approval. In the end, the new Constitution is likely to become yet another matter for the court, which has yet to render a final decision on Fosco's attempt to place the Mail Handlers under supervision.

Ironically, the reformers' support for a more democratic union has made them more vulnerable to Liuna, evidence of the insurgents' egalitarian convictions. If the election had been left to the convention delegates, as in the past, Berrien and Wright would almost certainly have won new terms. Now they must campaign for the votes of the thousands of men and women who handle bags of mail, in the hope that the membership will share in the reformers' democratic vision in sufficient numbers. If Liuna can't head off the election, the international's allies in the Mail Handlers may well try to defeat the reformers with their own campaign assault.

The Mail Handlers cause is muddied, of course, by the facts that Herbert Walker confessed to stealing from his Cincinnati local and that Berrien and Wright still speak fondly of Walker because he fought for the Mail Handlers' autonomy. (They even asked his sentencing judge to go light on him.) Still, the reformist Mail Handlers now tilting at Liuna appear genuinely driven by a desire to make their union more democratic and responsive to members. At a time when automation threatens Postal Service workers, when various unions are competing for the available jobs and when working conditions are seen by most Mail Handlers to be deteriorating, those who haul the mail sacks need all the help they can get.

In the end, this intra-union struggle goes to the heart of an ongoing problem in the labor movement: How can unionists dedicated to democracy and activism confront ossified—and sometimes corrupt—Big Labor leaders? Unions should make room for motivated reformers, but that's not likely in this case. Fosco recently tried to impose yet another trusteeship on the division, but on December 19 a Federal court ordered him to stop and handed the Mail Handlers one victory in a fight that will not end soon. □

European TV

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

received on their territory," says George Wedell, director of the European Institute for the Media at Manchester University in Britain. "Now that is breaking down, largely as a result of technological advances in satellite and cable communications."

Together with the technological advances, a climate of aggressive deregulation across the Continent has helped spur the creation of dozens of new commercially supported television channels, many operated by the Big Four. All of Europe has been swept up in the free-market wave spearheaded by the government of Margaret Thatcher in Britain. France has privatized its leading public network; Italy and Germany have rewritten their communications laws to allow for the creation of private, advertising-supported television.

Britain retains its position as leader in the effort to push television into the marketplace. In November the government produced a white paper on broadcasting, intended as the basis for future legislation and which placed the British independent television companies at the center of a high-stakes bidding war in which the winning franchises will no longer be constrained by former mandates to "educate and inform."

In Brussels, the Commission of the European Communities, forced to keep step with near-daily changes in the broadcast industry, is well along in drafting a directive that will facilitate what it calls the "television without frontiers" of the 1990s. The directive will eliminate existing laws that protect national networks from foreign competition. The E.C., like Britain, expects the deregulation of television to create greater choice for consumers, new spaces for media operators and, in the words of one draft proposal, a "closer union among the peoples of Europe."

Although the number of media enterprises has increased exponentially, ownership and control have grown more concentrated. The foursome of Maxwell, Murdoch, Kirch and Berlusconi are now in the process of pooling their interests and creating joint ventures that will guarantee them dominance over many of the new networks—satellite, cable and broadcast. Their efforts have received the rubber stamp of the E.C.

"At the root of the issue [is] the circulation of cultural goods and services," says Ulf Bruehann, a chief author of the forthcoming E.C. directive and head of a division of the Internal Market and Industrial Affairs Directorate. "No one disputes that broadcasting has certain cultural aspects. [But] because of the importance of the notion of free trade, cul-

William Fisher is the Paris correspondent of Screen International, *a British film and television weekly. Mark Schapiro, formerly InterNation editor, is now a senior editor at* Mother Jones.

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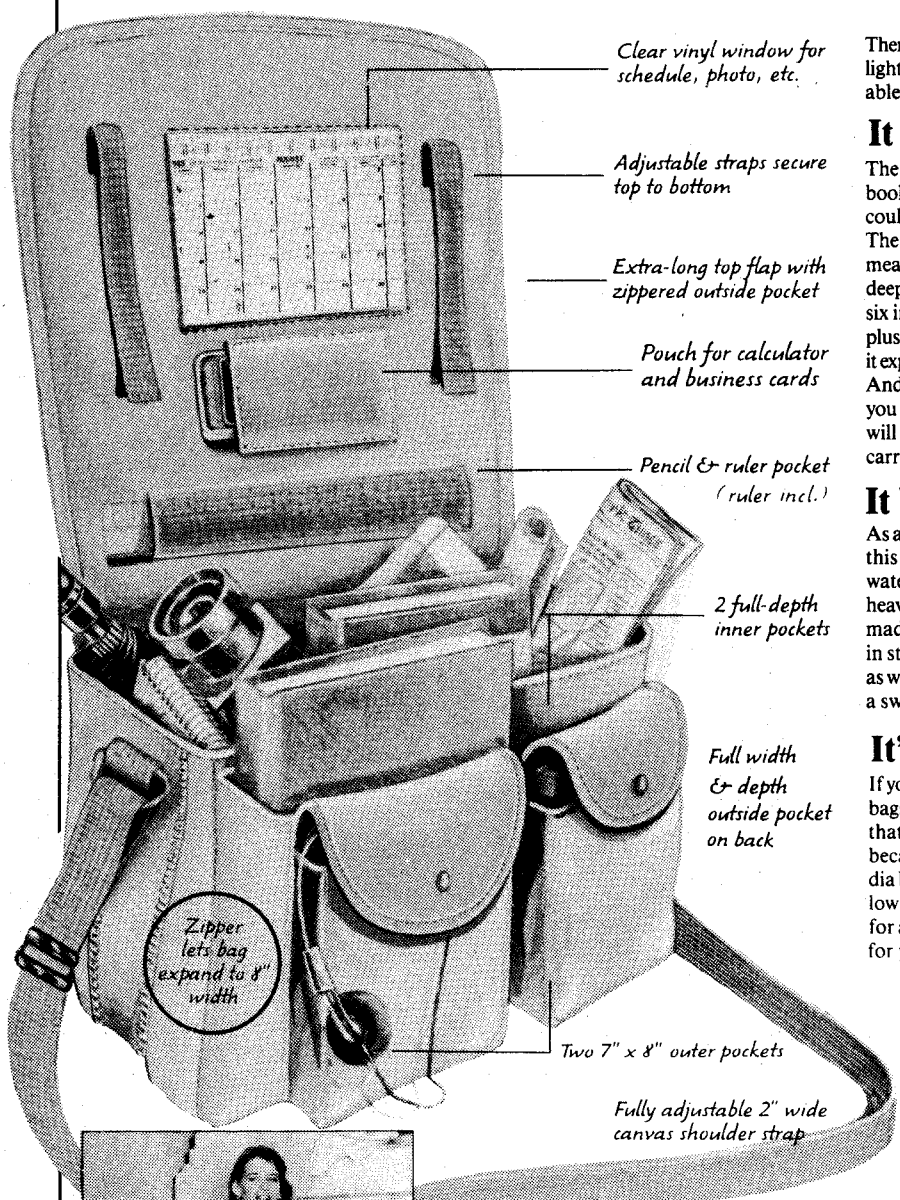
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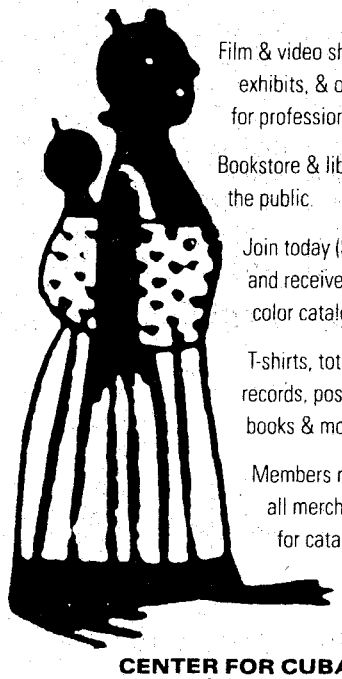

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tural identity and quality will always lose out in commission decision-making." As the state's role officially diminishes, the quartet of media magnates is emerging as a principal force behind Europe's new consciousness industry.

§ The blustering Robert Maxwell presents himself as the telecommunications visionary who speaks for "the new Europe." Pitching for an E.C.-wide quota limiting external programs, he proclaims, "We will be masters in our own house, we will not accept domination by the U.S." (What he does not say is that he would be one of the principal providers of European programming.)

Maxwell's strategy is to buy pieces of existing stations. He owns 20 percent of Britain's Central Television; 12 percent of France's TF1; 10 percent of a new satellite channel serving Spain, Canal 10; and he is currently negotiating moves into Portugal and Germany. Maxwell also shares a large interest in MTV-Europe and the movie channel Premiere. He dreams of pushing his Maxwell Communications conglomerate—with extensive interests in newspapers, book publishing and printing, as well as TV production and distribution facilities—into the top ten global media companies, and boasts that by the end of 1992 he will show a turnover that will run between $3 billion and $5 billion a year.

§ Rupert Murdoch, who is notorious for subverting anti-monopoly regulations in his major bases of operation—the United States, Britain and Australia—has been writing his own rules in the uncharted area of satellite broadcasting. He has a 90 percent interest in Sky Channel, which beams a mix of subtitled American serials, rock videos and talk shows into Britain, Belgium, Holland and Scandinavia.

Murdoch's media strategy is to create an integrated system of supports to his broadcast enterprises (his recent purchase of America's *TV Guide* is one example). Through his control of 20th Century-Fox Broadcasting (which supplies thousands of hours of programs and films to Murdoch's European broadcasts) and his 50 percent interest in a research venture with the British electronics firm Amstrad (to produce the consumer receiving dishes that will pick up his programs), Murdoch's broadcast empire is integrated into program supply and distribution more thoroughly than that of any of his competitors.

Last summer he announced plans to launch four new channels on the ASTRA satellite: Sky Channel; Sky News, a twenty-four-hour news program to be created by journalists from his leading print properties, *The Times* and *Sunday Times* of London; Sky Movies, which will rely heavily on 20th Century-Fox's vast film library; and a sports channel, currently the subject of an antitrust lawsuit by competitors.

§ Leo Kirch's Beta-Taurus Group is the biggest buyer and seller of German-language programs in Europe. Unlike his counterparts, who have acquired diverse properties throughout the Continent, Kirch has concentrated on building an unrivaled power base in a single country—West Germany—gaining a stranglehold on rights to 15,000 feature films (including three-quarters of *Variety*'s top twenty-five) and 50,000 hours of German-language programming. Thus, his

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competitors must deal with him to gain access to the top titles in his library. Protesting this monopoly, Germany's largest public network, A.R.D., has long boycotted Kirch's library. His range of holdings, however, makes this almost impossible. "We have a monopoly on programming," confides one top-level Beta-Taurus official, "both in quantity and quality. The public networks have to come to us. In fact they already do, on an informal basis, in spite of their boycott."

Last spring Kirch acquired control of Germany's largest private network, SAT1 (a takeover that is currently the subject of an insider trading investigation at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange). He also controls a nationwide pay-TV channel and recently created a new pay network servicing the German-speaking portion of Switzerland. Kirch's media empire is a model of vertical integration. He is his own best client: Although SAT1 itself has long been a money-loser, Kirch's profits from a SAT1 subsidiary that buys his own programs have easily offset those losses.

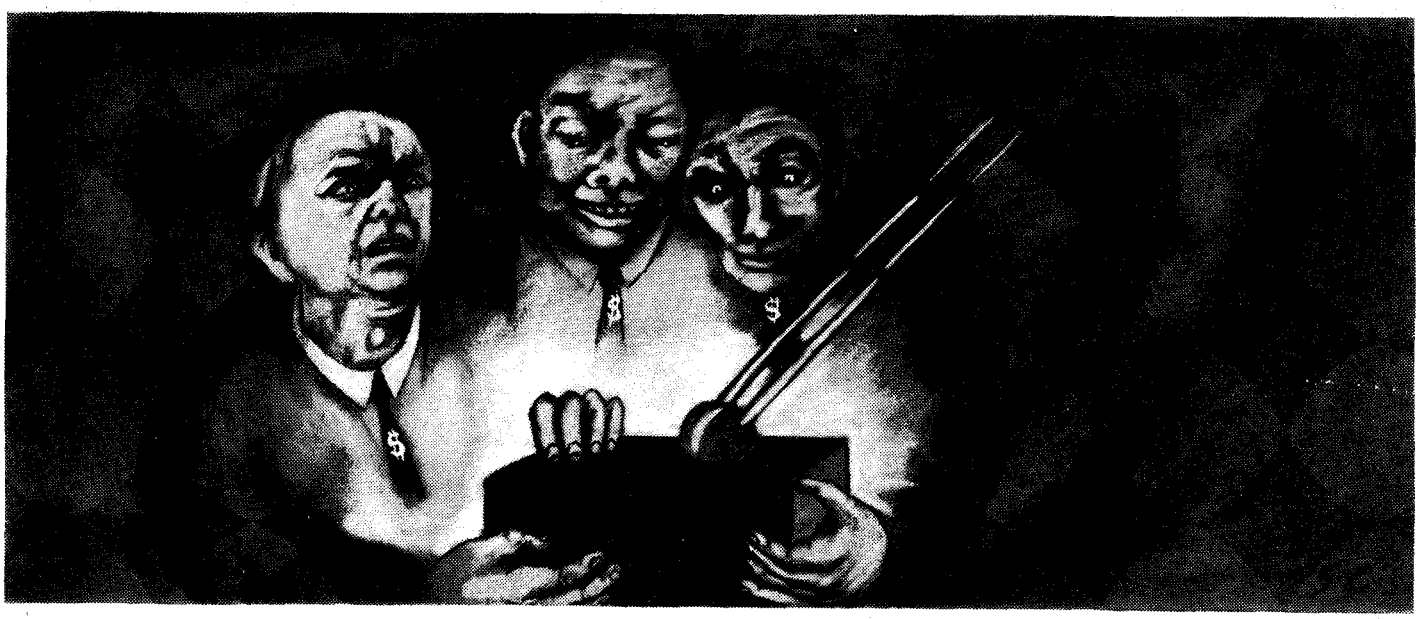
§ Silvio Berlusconi, believed to be one of the richest men in Italy, is the first of the television moguls to have taken on a public television monopoly and won. He circumvented Italian prohibitions on a private nationwide network by creating a chain of local stations and synchronizing their programming. Berlusconi's three "networks" now have a commercial success unrivaled in Europe: 60 percent of Italian ad revenues go to them. Berlusconi's programming recipe mixes American soap operas, Brazilian adventure films, teleshopping and sexually titillating game shows; Italy's public network, RAI, has responded with more of the same.

In France, Berlusconi is a leading partner in the newly created fifth station, La Cinq; in Germany he owns 45 percent of Tele-5, soon to be a nationwide broadcast network; and he has major interests in Spain, Tunisia and Yugoslavia. Berlusconi's company is also the exclusive advertising representative for Soviet television in Europe. Commonly described as a "visionary," Berlusconi told a German media magazine that "television is for pleasure, for bringing the family together and for killing time. Those are the three functions of commercial TV."

Although the advocates of commercial TV hail a new age of declining political influence over the media, the opposite often is the case. In Britain, Prime Minister Thatcher's government has created a new Broadcasting Standards Council, stacked with her political allies and charged with overseeing "standards of taste and decency" on television. The council's judgments on sex, violence and political balance are also expected to have a significant bearing on license renewals for operators—an important tool of government influence over the content of television.

The four new titans of the satellite age themselves have profited from personal political ties. Berlusconi, for example, had a powerful patron in his childhood friend Bettino Craxi, the former Socialist Prime Minister of Italy, who looked the other way as Berlusconi trampled Italian broadcast restrictions. Robert Maxwell, a former British Labor Member of Parliament, has curried the favor of French Socialist President François Mitterrand, who helped ease his entry into the French television and print market (traditionally one of the most inaccessible in Europe). Rupert Murdoch has been aided by Thatcher's Anti-Monopoly Commission, which recently cleared the press lord's acquisition of 20 percent of the Pearson Group, publisher of the *Financial Times*. In Germany, Leo Kirch has benefited from his friendships with the late Conservative leader Franz-Josef Strauss of Bavaria and Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmerman, who oversees German broadcast matters.

The image of these men as struggling rivals is largely illusory. Their interests often overlap. While competing in some countries, they cooperate in others. In Germany, Kirch and his major broadcast rival, the media conglomerate Bertelsmann (owner of the other private German network, R.T.L. Plus), operate the Cable Marketing Organization, Germany's only nationwide cable system. In Britain, "arch-rivals" Maxwell and Murdoch both have a stake in the satellite movie channel Premiere. In France, Berlusconi and Maxwell are currently bidding for a jointly operated pro-



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THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

The ties that bind the European communications industry together have begun to span the Atlantic: The United States remains the world's most lucrative entertainment market, and the European media moguls Robert Maxwell, Rupert Murdoch, Leo Kirch and Silvio Berlusconi are seeking major roles there.

In November, Maxwell purchased a leading U.S. publishing house, MacMillan. This acquisition, added to his British newspapers, makes Maxwell as formidable a figure in print as he is in broadcasting. Through his part ownership of the French network TF1, Maxwell is also involved in the French-language cable station TF1-USA, which broadcasts over the KFCE-Los Angeles network, serving as many as 300,000 viewers in southern California.

Last winter, Kirch's Beta-Taurus Films made its first advance into the United States, establishing a joint venture with the Tribune Company of Chicago to develop and produce TV programming for U.S. and worldwide distribution.

Berlusconi's holding company Fininvest started a new branch for worldwide TV distribution in 1987. Through its Los Angeles office Berlusconi aims to promote co-productions between his Italian-based operations and U.S. television. He is already collaborating with Lorimar Telepictures and the syndication group Harmony Gold, and is seeking to acquire small U.S. distribution companies. A recent agreement with the Cannon Group to co-produce films means that audiences are soon likely to see Berlusconi's imprimatur at cinemas across the land.

Murdoch is the only one of the European magnates to have become a household name in the United States. In addition to owning newspapers across the country, Murdoch's brand of television has become familiar through his establishment of a fourth network, the Fox Broadcasting Company, created by buying the Metromedia group of independent TV stations in 1986. (This has yet to pay off: Fox has lost $130 million to date.) The backbone of the network includes call stations in seven major cities.

Murdoch's 20 percent share in 20th Century-Fox gives him access to an enterprise that represents 13 percent of total U.S. movie production, as well as a valuable archive of more than 3,000 films and TV programs from *Star Wars* to *Dynasty*. He also holds a stake in a leading worldwide video distributor, CBS Fox Video.

In addition, Murdoch controls the publishing house Harper & Row and printing facilities. He recently acquired Triangle Productions, which puts out *TV Guide*, for $2.8 billion. His U.S. print holdings include *New York*, *New Woman*, *Premiere*, the *Star* tabloid and thirty-three other specialty magazines. —W.F. AND M.S.

gram on the French government's new direct broadcast satellite TDF1.

Berlusconi, Kirch and Maxwell also come together in the European Production Consortium, created to promote European co-productions, which each of the three may exploit in his respective markets. This mighty alliance of finance capital was formed at the urging of Mitterrand's Socialist government. The programs produced thus far under this umbrella range from the retelling of the Nativity to Henry Kissinger ruminating on the causes of World War II.

In the absence of any transnational regulations, the private broadcasters have often taken the law into their own hands. Last year, Berlusconi evaded Italian restrictions on broadcasting live sporting events by using a transmission facility on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast to beam such events to an Italian audience—programming which his company values at $1.2 billion in yearly ad revenues. Maxwell evinces a similarly cavalier attitude by providing Spain with a private satellite television service of dubious pedigree, Canal 10, which has been broadcasting from Britain through its parent company, which is registered in Panama. Murdoch recently made his own foray into pirate television by taking the first steps toward installing a television transmitter on an offshore tax haven, the Isle of Man. Powerful enough to cover most of the British Isles, the transmitter would avoid both the costs and regulations of doing the same from the British mainland.

The E.C. directive currently being drawn up in Brussels completely skirts the issue of concentration of ownership. Among its sharpest critics are some of its own authors, who feel they have been outflanked by technological advances and private-sector pressure. "It's useless to try and do battle in the big leagues," says Mariano Maggiore, a deputy of the audiovisual production division for the European Commission. "There is nothing that I would like to see more than an antitrust clause. However, I don't think anyone has the strength to fight them. It's like fighting windmills. We can only accommodate them." Indeed, the E.C.'s fledgling directorate in charge of overseeing anticompetitive practices maintains a staff of only seven attorneys to monitor the more than 1,500 mergers that took place in Europe in 1987.

The main advocates of European unification are a mixed bag of Europe's major industrialists (who have been constrained by tariffs on exports to their European neighbors and now see 1992 as their ticket to a larger, unified home market) and "Euronationalists," a diverse array of politicians and intellectuals who seek a more potent global role for Europe. They envision the Europe of 1992 as a single economic unit, a powerful counterpoint to the East-West divide that has defined world affairs since World War II.

While the vision of a European "electronic village" is attractive to E.C. legislators and media financiers, European audiences have not always shown the same enthusiasm. Though viewing figures have shot up over the past three years, audiences and advertisers have stayed loyal to broadcasters in their own country and generally rejected trans-European programming. Before Sky Channel's October announcement that it would pull out of Germany, market re-

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A National Call to Action

In El Salvador the U.S. is waging the largest counterinsurgency war since Vietnam. During the last nine years 70,000 people have been killed, the vast majority slaughtered by government-controlled death squads and the armed forces. The United States has spent more than $3.6 billion to maintain the Salvadoran government in power.

With the election of George Bush as President we face the threat that the madness of the Reagan administration will not only continue but may escalate to the point of commitment of U.S. troops. This dangerous situation demands that we take a bold step toward preventing another Vietnam War in Central America before it is too late.

We are initiating a campaign of active protest and nonviolent direct action to bring the war in El Salvador to an end. We are calling for nationally coordinated protests on January 20 to demand that President Bush end the U.S. war in El Salvador and for nationwide local actions on March 18 - 20 to demand that Congress stop funding the war. Through active resistance, we will end the U.S. war in El Salvador and Central America.

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search indicated that the average German viewer tuned in to the station for thirty seconds a day—just long enough to switch channels. Rupert Murdoch has lost $102 million over the past five years on the station, and his chief rival, Super Channel, was recently sold to Italian investors for a token £1. The biggest stumbling blocks have been the linguistic and cultural differences among the various European audiences, and the unwillingness of advertisers to address different markets with the same commercials. Having dreamed at one point of a large integrated market for their products, these advertisers have discovered that it is more effective to target European viewing audiences more precisely.

According to Alastair Tempest, a spokesman for the European Advertising Agencies Tripartite, advertisers are now looking toward a "stratified broadcasting system, some national, some transnational [programs], each with its niche." In response to the demands of advertisers—a source of revenue expected to exceed $7 billion annually by the early 1990s—Europe's media magnates are now seeking to create a chain of interlocking, nationally based stations rather than a single trans-frontier system.

While this would seem to indicate viewers' attachment to home-grown TV, current E.C. proposals make no provisions to protect the rights of countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark, where public service television is one of the principal guardians of national culture. Richard Schoonhoven, media director of KRO-TV, one of the three leading public networks in the Netherlands, points out that a "public broadcasting body with all its legal, monetary and time restrictions, and its programmatical obligations—expensive programs for small groups—cannot possibly compete with a program tradesman who has only the market to consider. He will be able to devote himself entirely to the product for the widest possible public, to what most people will always want to see and the fewest people will reject. That which some people will ask for some of the time will disappear from the market."

Holde Lhoest, a former executive for Belgian and German public television and now director of the E.C.'s media program, is another critic of the directive. "The directive was written by lawyers who have never set foot inside a studio and who don't understand the complexity of the audiovisual sector," Lhoest says. "For them the basic philosophy of the big internal market is the top priority. . . . There is no question that under the directive, [public] television in small countries will disappear."

By addressing an imaginary trans-European majority instead of the Continent's vast, pluralistic audience, current E.C. efforts are likely to encourage broadcasters to aim for the lowest common denominator in their quest for ratings and advertisers: Given the choice between expensive original programs or a greater volume of cheap off-the-shelf material, programmers will often choose the latter. Public networks must then either meet the private broadcasters on their own ground or risk being edged into the margins in audience share.

Jean-Paul Trefois, a programming executive with Belgium's leading public network, RTBF, says, "We can't compete on the same terrain with the large commercial programmers for lack of size and money. . . . The RTBF is still the top-rated program here. We reflect the life of Belgium better, especially with regard to news and information. However, one must remember that we are obliged to broadcast programs—masses, special immigrant programs, Socialist pep rallies. How are we meant to compete with *Dallas* and *Dynasty*? True, we will always be there with the same charter, the same programs, but in the future we will have to accept a position like PBS's in the States, with a less than 5 percent audience share."

The prospects for programming are not entirely bleak. Commercial pressures have pushed some of Europe's networks to develop more ambitious, big-budget projects that require cooperation among Europe's private and public broadcasters. Competitive bidding for production contracts has brought new independent producers into the market. And these independents have looked to Britain's Channel Four as a model for promoting inventive new programming, successfully lobbying the E.C. and the Thatcher government for a guaranteed minimum of independently produced programming.

Yet this burgeoning independent scene is still overwhelmed by the reality of a television industry that grows more concentrated by the day. As the skies become thick with broadcast signals, it appears that the E.C.'s stated goal of encouraging television "to reflect the Community's cultural diversity and richness" is increasingly giving rise instead to infinite variations on the same product. At the annual International Television Program Market in Cannes in October, television marketeers from around the world, led by Maxwell, Murdoch, Kirch and Berlusconi, took part in a record-breaking frenzy of program buying intended, as one observer put it, to unite a television audience "from priest-ridden Portugal to Protestant Finland." All told, it is estimated that nearly $1 billion was committed to programs during the weeklong extravaganza—much of it on off-the-shelf American serials and movies to feed the expanding web of broadcast, cable and satellite television across Europe. In the images that flickered across countless video screens in Cannes, Europeans had their first preview of coming attractions for the "unified" Continent of 1992. □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Deride and Conquer

JACKSON LEARS

BOXED IN: The Culture of TV. *By Mark Crispin Miller. Northwestern University Press. 349 pp. $39.95. Paper $14.95.*

A decade and a half ago I was seated in the subterranean snack bar of a major eastern university across from a graduate student who was delivering his version of the gospel according to Derrida: "So you see," he concluded without irony, "an all-encompassing irony is the most radical stance of all." Only years later did I realize that I had been seated at the cusp of intellectual fashion, that inverted commas were about to descend over vast areas of our cultural life and that the new signifier of subversion was about to become the smirk.

This sort of change may be difficult to describe with any precision, but it is palpable enough to persuade me that the worn term "postmodern" might have some meaning. The cultural style that has emerged in the past decade or so, one that celebrates irony as a way of life, could plausibly be called postmodern. The postmodern hero is street-smart and adwise; he sees through everything; decodes everything, mostly for fun; and is always protected by his ironic detachment. He has antecedents in the 1960s and even earlier: the poses of Duchamp and Warhol; the polemics of Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler against the high seriousness of modernism. But it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that "all-encompassing irony" acquired the imprimatur of post-structuralist criticism and became the pose of choice among the literary intelligentsia.

One result of this change in sensibility has been the vindication of mass entertainment. Television, from the postmodern view I'm oversimplifying, is an instrument of personal autonomy. The postmodern hero, shielded from mass cult contamination by his ironic stance, can engage in *bricolage* by remote control, flipping channels and creating a fluid sense of self that can slip through the boundaries of suburban convention. Irony is the key to this escape; after all, nobody takes TV seriously.

Amid this threnody, Mark Crispin Miller's *Boxed In* strikes a discordant note. The book is a collection of essays—on TV ads for tourism in Jamaica and Shield deodorant soap, on *Hill Street Blues*, the Jerry Lewis telethon and many other texts of mass-marketed entertainment. The essays are united by an effort "to grasp the anarchic spectacle that is our culture"—to grasp it by the throat and squeeze. They are animated by a fierce anger that is nevertheless frequently leavened by humor and justified by eloquent argument. If Miller's anger allows him to weaken his case through overstatement, he has nevertheless produced the most probing critique of contemporary television that I have ever seen.

At the outset Miller brushes aside the tendency to equate criticism of TV with criticism of the TV audience. "Contrary to the assumption both of its highbrow detractors and its self-conscious devotees," he writes, "TV is not an expression of 'the people,' not 'vulgar' in any traditional sense, but an effective corporate instrument, whose sole purpose—as its executives will tell you—is to sell you to the advertisers; and it does so, in part, precisely through the very irony which some now celebrate as the proof of mass immunity." The second part of that sentence points to Miller's most original argument: his critique of the cult of irony.

Rather than serving as a defense against television, Miller argues, the ironic stance is the medium's subtlest means of infiltrating the wider culture.

> For example, in situation comedies or "sitcoms"—TV's definitive creation—the "comedy" almost always consists of a weak, compulsive jeering that immediately wipes out any divergence from the indefinite collective standard. The characters vie at self-containment, reacting to every simulation of intensity, every bright idea, every mechanical enthusiasm with the same deflating look of jaded incredulity. . . . TV seems to flatter the inert skepticism of its own audience, assuring them they can do no better than to stay right where they are, rolling their eyes in feeble disbelief. And yet such apparent flattery of our viewpoint is in fact a recurrent warning not to rise above this slack, derisive gaping. . . . Each time some deadpan tot on a sitcom reacts to his frantic mom with a disgusted sigh, or whenever the polished anchorman punctuates his footage of "extremists" with a look that speaks his well-groomed disapproval . . . we are being flattered with a gesture of inclusion, the wink that tells us "*We* are in the know." And yet we are the ones belittled by each subtle televisual gaze, which offers not a welcome but an ultimatum—that we had better see the joke or else turn into it.

The pervasive irony on television is a symptom, in Miller's view, of the medium's complete capitulation to its function as a purveyor of commodities. In the early years of TV (and in earlier advertising generally), he thinks, there were countertendencies, glimpses of a world beyond fast cars and shopping malls, which posed a potentially subversive contrast to the corrosive knowingness of the corporate world view. But since the late 1970s the televisual strategy of "deride and conquer" has driven out all alternatives. From Miller's perspective it is absurd to speak of a "liberal bias" or indeed of any other form of ideological commitment on television; the marketing orientation of TV executives permits nothing more than a "timid majoritarianism" in news analysis. Reporters strain to replicate the "national mood" created by opinion polls; like advertisers and other packagers of sentiment, they aim for just the right blend of superficial novelty and underlying conventionality. (Make it new, but not too new.) And like the sitcom tots, they constantly need to flog the dead horse of moral earnestness in order to maintain their air of derisive detachment. That is why militance always appears as madness on TV, and violence rooted in ancient political or economic grievances can be so easily dismissed as a form of insanity.

Miller's attack on televisual irony is part of a broader cultural critique, which he articulates in the book's most powerful essay, "Big Brother Is You, Watching." Here he makes clear his debt to Frankfurt School thinkers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno—who are usually dismissed from the postmodern perspective as a couple of old frumps who didn't know a cookin' party when they saw one. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the drive to disenchant and control nature through scientific technique had ended by erasing all metaphysical

Jackson Lears teaches history at Rutgers University and is writing a book about the relations between American culture and American advertising.

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beliefs, even those that had justified Enlightenment in the first place. "God," "Nature," "History," "The People," "Social Justice"—none of these abstractions survived the demythifying impulse; all came to seem mere "sentimental fabrications." As Miller writes, "Enlightenment, then, is finally bent on leaving nothing extant but its own implicit violence." So we are left with a form of domination that seems at once archaic and peculiarly modern—one that is dependent not on the imposition of belief but on the *absence* of belief, the creation of a void in which only power matters.

Miller's "Big Brother" essay ingeniously shows the dialectic of Enlightenment at work in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and on America's telescreens in the 1980s. The Party systematically entraps Winston Smith and reduces his earnest idealism to ridiculous spectacle; its weapons are "the weapons of pure irony, which is necessarily the attitudinal vehicle and expression of Enlightenment. Analogous to Enlightenment and fostered by it, pure irony denudes the world of every value, devastating—with just a little smile and deft repetition—whatever person, concept, feeling, belief, or tradition it encounters, until there is nothing left but the urge to ironize." To avoid this dead end, the ironist must continually re-create the targets he has destroyed: the Party is continually finding signs of resistant subjectivity ("Thoughtcrime") among the populace of Oceania, while TV locates similar evidence in the bigot or sexist who is the chief butt of sitcom humor.

> Despite the butt's broad illiberality, what makes him appear ridiculous in TV's eyes is not his antidemocratic bias but his vestigial individuality, his persistence as a self sturdy and autonomous enough to sense that there is something missing from the televisual world, and to hunger for it, although ostracized for this desire by the sarcastic mob that watches and surrounds him. Like Winston Smith, the butt yearns for and exemplifies the past that brought about the present, and which the present now discredits through obsessive mockery.

The aim of TV irony is not to promote "progressive" political ideals but to discredit all ideals by enlisting viewers in a comprehensive program of subtle self-oppression: urging them "to live up, or down, to the same standard of acceptability that TV's ads and shows define collectively," to turn themselves into models of blasé self-containment. ("You always look so cool," Daisy Buchanan told Jay in *The Great Gatsby*, "You resemble the advertisement of the man.") The viewer's sneer, from this view, is not a mark of disengagement but of unwitting collaboration with the televisual agenda. "As you watch, there is no Big Brother out there watching you—not because there isn't a Big Brother, but because Big Brother is you, watching." This argument is far more sophisticated than the familiar rantings of the "highbrow Jeremiah"—a foil as necessary to the TV propagandist, Miller notes, as the butt is to the sitcom scriptwriter. Miller has carried the Frankfurt School critique to a chilling conclusion.

Yet he does so with an élan all his own. Miller may be the funniest as well as the most perceptive media critic at work today. Nancy Reagan, he writes, "glassy-eyed and overdressed, always looks as if she's just been struck by lightning in a limousine." Her husband, despite bringing ostentation back into the White House, "has us thinking that he wears white socks and carries a penknife"—except when his mobile, telegenic countenance comes (ever so rarely) to rest: "At such terrifying moments of repose, all the boyishness drains out of him, and he suddenly starts looking like an anaconda, with his beady eyes and flat lipless head." All those hours in front of the VCR have paid off.

Miller's wit also stems from his rich fund of references to pop-culture clichés of the past: Wayne Newton, for example, shows up on the Jerry Lewis telethon, "looking like one of those evil lawyers who try to bilk the Three Stooges out of their inheritance." The comedy is not simply gratuitous, as Miller shows in his dissection of the Hollywood myths "that it's swell to be poor, that we'll always make it if we try, that hormones are a girl's best friend." The pushy American broad, buttoned-up and miserable until she meets Mr. Right and discovers her feminine biological imperative; the tranquil Italian earth mother who lives only "to grimace in a man's embrace, and to pick up, in loving wonderment, an occasional baby"—these images "linger on into the present, making money and causing trouble, like old mobsters." With a few clever phrases, Miller has summarized hundreds of dissertations on Gender in Cinema.

Still, *Boxed In* could have been more persuasive. Sometimes Miller is so eager to find signs of brain death in mass culture that he delivers premature obituaries—

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though he is gracious enough to recant upon occasion in an afterword. "In early 1977, I was wrong to call rock music 'a finished thing,'" he admits, "because it was just then coming up for the third time." *This* time, though, he's sure he's finished it off by demonstrating how "songs once passionate" have become "a joke" through incorporation into inane marketing strategies. "Now, viewer, try to listen to 'I Heard It Through the Grapevine' without thinking about raisins." Well, that's not really too hard (for me at least); maybe Miller has been watching too much television.

Miller's assumption that viewers' earlier memories are inevitably displaced by marketing imagery points to a larger problem: his tendency to forget the crucial distinction between text and audience. Despite his preliminary (and necessary) separation of TV from its viewers, he sometimes assumes that televisual strategies shape the minds agape in all those living rooms, including (at least rhetorically) his own: "Repeatedly subjected to TV's small jolts," he writes, "we become incapable of outright shock or intense arousal, lapsing into a constant, dull anxiety wherein we can hardly sense the difference between a famine and a case of body odor." Even granting Miller hyperbolic license, the question to ask is, Who are "we"? And how has Miller gained access to "our" state of mind? By sliding from textual analysis to sociological assertion, *Boxed In* fulfills the claustrophobic promise of its title, the conclusion that there is no exit from the nightmare world of America's telescreens.

Or if there is an escape, it is only into the frantic, life-denying stance of bourgeois moralism—the outlook enacted by the butts of sitcom humor. Miller's dualism here reflects current critical discourse on selfhood, wherein the only alternative to the "decentered" postmodern style is the "unified" Victorian. But one might have expected more from a critic so impatient with formulaic thought. Unfortunately, Miller's own argument begins, before the end, to seem a bit predictable too, as every manifestation of vitality in mass culture is exposed as a snare and a delusion.

While Miller allows that "there is such a thing as art even on TV, and for those rare exceptions we should be grateful," with the exception of his eulogy to Hitchcock, he spends all his energy on unmasking lies and none on reclaiming marvels. Yet even in his most acidic moments Adorno acknowledged that mass-culture

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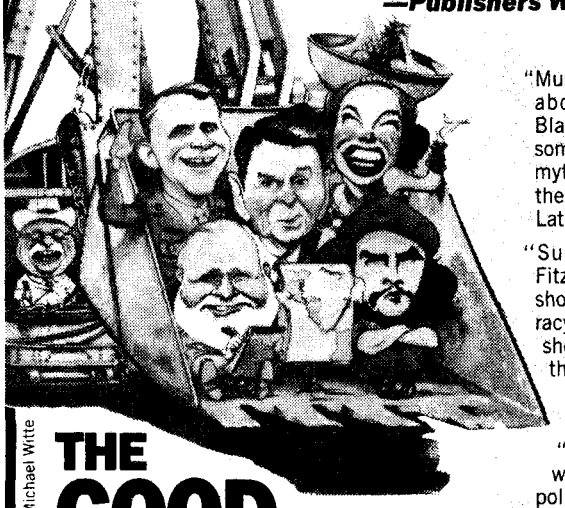

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images could embody longings for a sense of wholeness and harmony that seemed unavailable under industrial capitalism. This insight could be directly applied to some of the sentimental images of "sharing and caring" in American advertising and television, but Miller refuses to grant commercial sentimentalists even a perverted expression of emotion: "This obsession with feeling betrays nothing more than a panicked inability to feel," he writes.

Despite its formidable power, Miller's argument is weakened by his determination to represent contemporary mass entertainment, and above all television, as an unbroken surface of commodity fetishism. Television may have nearly reached that condition, but there are still a few cracks in the facade. One is occupied, in my household at least, by Pee-Wee Herman. His "subversiveness" was celebrated in a seminar at Johns Hopkins, much to Miller's amusement. But for all its apparent silliness, the seminar may have had a point. The capering comedian in the preshrunk suit presents a brilliantly satirical alternative to dominant versions of masculine selfhood—whether suave anchormen or Masters of the Universe. Paul Rubens's antics are characterized by the more benign features of postmodern performance, notably the play with gender ambiguities and faded cartoons. But the fantastic stage set is equally important: There are chairs that talk, cows that give chocolate milk and tiny clay dinosaurs cavorting behind the wainscoting. This is the animated universe of early childhood—the lost world of imagined wholeness that energized the Frankfurt School's utopian longings, and that may be our last refuge from the enlightened reign of calculation. It is a realm of memory and imagination rather than political action, but it is a genuine alternative to oppressive cultural forms. Maybe Pee-Wee's anarchic gestures have already begun to succumb to the corporate demiurge that haunts TV scriptwriters. These things happen. But for a while at least, amid the nothingness of televisual irony, there have been worse places to hang out than Pee-Wee's playhouse. □

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Gender Is Everywhere

JANE CAPLAN

GENDER AND THE POLITICS OF HISTORY. *By Joan Wallach Scott. Columbia University Press. 242 pp. $29.*

In this thoughtful and pioneering collection of essays, the feminist historian Joan Scott subjects her profession's untheoretical practices to sharp critique from a deconstructionist point of view. This isn't by any means the first time that history as a discipline has been taken to task for its theoretical innocence: Earlier encroachments on its terrain have been launched in the name of sociology and quantification, for example, not to mention Marxism. History has, I think, been particularly susceptible to interdisciplinary friction of this kind, and has often been regarded as peculiarly un-self-conscious about its own politics. If this were just a matter of academic infighting, it wouldn't be very interesting to anyone except its protagonists. But these interdisciplinary encounters have always been more than antiquarian dogfights. They are the means by which intellectual culture reproduces its authority—or, alternatively, revises its conventions. At stake are crucial, and ultimately political, rights to speak authoritatively about what knowledge is, how it is constituted and how it should be transmitted.

Most recently, a tentative and prickly convergence has been taking place between history and literary criticism, to the dismay of some and to the excitement of others. Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* challenges politically engaged historians to reconsider their efforts to reconstruct a "real" past and explain the causes of change, and to focus instead on the processes by which power is conceptually constructed, deployed and legitimized. This means rejecting what Scott calls a "unilinear account of experience, identity and politics," along with the inductionist model of politicization that follows from it: the assumption that experience is derived from an objective reality; that identity is based on consciousness of self and interest; that politics is a form of collective consciousness built from the perception of common interest. Instead, following the literary critic Jacques Derrida and the philosopher/historian Michel Foucault, Scott argues that "the real" is itself an effect, the discursive product of a particular, positivist epistemology; that "identity" of any kind is a fictive unity given to something that is always unstable and incoherent; and that, in the end, the only objects of study (or of belief or consciousness or politics) are not objective realities but epistemological categories.

Scott also suggests that deconstruction offers a means of putting these somewhat abstract ideas to work both historically and politically. The characteristic deconstructive move is to tease out the war of meanings in a text: to demonstrate that what purports to be the subject of the text is actually accompanied by other possible meanings that are marginalized or discounted in such a way that the primary point is foregrounded. More specifically—and this is the poststructuralist gesture—the critic will identify the primary binary opposition on which the text rests, and show that the opposition works only because each term's identity has been artificially stabilized by repressing what it actually has in common with the other. In other words, both the coherent subject and the dualism are unstable fictions: All that exists is the multiple play of difference.

Critics of this method point out that it risks reducing both politics and history to a series of intellectual gestures, a gyration around ever shifting points of perspective. Scott, however, argues that it offers release from the tyranny of dualism, especially the dualism fixed in gender; she sees more hope in a history and a politics that start in the recognition of diversity than in ideologies that assign fixed meanings to class, gender or anything else. Part of the tyranny's power is that it so effectively displaces its own origins and masks its effects. In a close analysis of E.P. Thompson's classic *The Making of the English Working Class*, Scott demonstrates how this text rests

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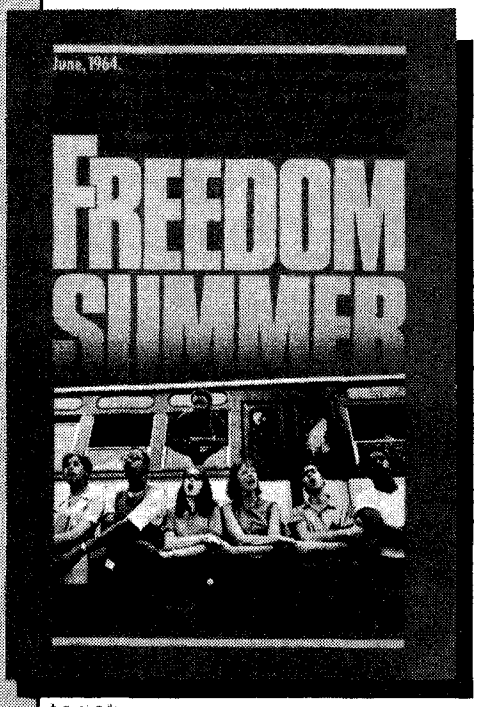
methodologically and structurally on an unquestioned dualism, pivoted on gender, that leaves intact our conventional associations—men/public/politics/rationalist versus women/private/domestic/expressive. As a result, Thompson's depictions of women activists reproduce this schema because women like the prophet Joanna Southcott are treated as antithetical to the model of rationalist politics, while the radical Susannah Wright must be seen as exceptional. The point is not that Thompson deliberately neglects or marginalizes women, but that his account of class as well as gender is politically constrained and impoverished by its assumptions. The task of deconstruction is to expose the operations of these unquestioned categories in order to make them available for criticism and, ultimately, for political revision.

Although not all of Scott's essays use deconstructive method with equal explicitness or depth, the book's argument is expressed as much in its structure as in its content. Though many readers may want to treat the book as a collection to be dipped into at random, only if you follow Scott's initial request that it be read as a whole will you see how its careful architectonics express its political purpose. In four sets of essays she critiques history as a discipline through a discussion of gender; analyzes the role of gender and class in the work of Thompson and other labor historians; skillfully deconstructs a group of historical texts drawn from mid-nineteenth-century debates about French women workers; and uses history for shrewd political interventions, notably in connection with the recent Sears Roebuck anti-discrimination case. So Scott subtly guides readers from the academy to politics, and from gender to politics—but without allowing either pair to become fixed into a dualism.

Joan Scott is not alone in having found that it was feminism that generated these deep questions about historical interpretation. In her first essay, which serves as both an intellectual autobiography and a profile of institutional change, she examines the shifts of focus that have marked the first twenty years of women's history. When the feminist movement put women's history on the agenda in the late 1960s, both academic and activist research began with a recuperative woman-centered approach ("herstory," as it was playfully dubbed). Women's history aimed not only to restore women to their place in historical

CRUCIBLE OF A GENERATION



In June 1964, 1,000 young volunteers headed to Mississippi to register black voters. Murders, bombings, beatings, and arrests awaited them. Less dramatically, but no less significantly, they also encountered a liberating exposure to new lifestyles, new ideologies, and a new perspective on America and on themselves. The summer transformed them, and, as this riveting book shows, forged a crucial link between the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements that would soon sweep the nation.

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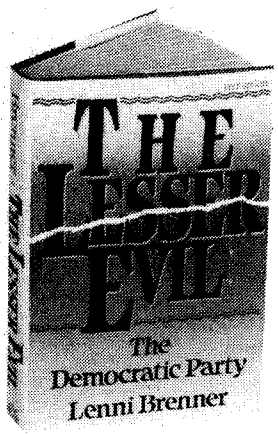

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narrative but to celebrate women as agents in the processes of historical change. Historians have effectively demolished the argument that women had no history, let alone a specific and effective history—a considerable achievement, not least measured by the volume of new publications and college courses in this previously nonexistent field. Yet, as Scott argues, the history of women is recovered at the risk of isolating them as an object of study, and so reproducing the very divisions that feminists presumably want to question. On the other hand, when research on women is integrated into existing traditions of social history, the significance of gender as an explanatory category is underplayed and questions about power are repressed. Academic social history, whether Marxist or sociological in inspiration, already has its own explanatory systems into which women and gender have to be fitted. And because social history is also conventionally separate from political history, the latter threatens to remain a history of men.

Following a kind of three bears model, Scott argues that the temperate zone between excessive isolation and excessive integration of women's history is occupied by the more recent turn to gender as a theoretical and political category. In this latest phase, the identity of "woman" and the collective agency of "women" can no longer simply be assumed: Their construction at any given moment becomes itself the object of inquiry. At the same time—and this is a crucial link in Scott's argument—gender as a subject returns power and politics to center stage and scatters to the winds the cultural and scholarly assignation of women to private life, men to public. If one common theme links Scott's essays, it is her insistence that this dichotomy is not only artificial, but also dissolves once you start to push at its edges. In other words, gender is everywhere, if you know what you're looking for.

Women's history has been a political as well as an academic activity, since it was born within the contemporary feminist movement and has served it and learned from it at every stage. From the very beginning, many students of women's history have wanted their work to change the way history is understood, just as feminists want to change the organization of the current gender system. Scott is agreeably unabashed about her own "avowedly political" purpose: "to point out and change inequalities between women and men." But she is equally insistent that, despite the chasm that often divides what goes on in the academy from grass-roots feminist activism, there need be no clash between "feminist politics and academic studies of gender" since both are equally political. This argument relies on her definition of politics as "the play of force involved in any society's construction and implementation of meanings." It marks the distance that separates her from a "pre-post-structuralist" politics, whether feminist, Marxist or liberal. It also demonstrates her commitment to transforming "women's history" into truly "feminist history."

The deconstructive method Scott uses is often viewed as an aggressive tool wielded by nihilists, but her essays brilliantly demonstrate that it can be used for constructive analysis. Yet given that the work of deconstruction is to expose contradictions, I would be missing the point if I did not end by suggesting some ways in which this book participates in the conflicts it describes. First, it's clear that it is difficult to get rid entirely of the old categories Scott critiques. We can read the return of the repressed "real" when she writes, for example, that a contemporary observer's "purported descriptions" of factory life in mid-nineteenth-century France were "exaggerated," and situates them against "other accounts" that explain how things actually were. Again, although Scott argues against accepting the subject as coherent and unitary, she speaks with a unified voice, and the sequential shifts in her own and others' perspectives are explained as the coherent effects of conscious participation in political and theoretical debate. Though she explains how theoretical positions have changed, she does not do as much as she could to locate these changes in the shifting ground of a broader political culture that sets the framework for ideology and practice. It is no criticism to point out that Scott's own equation of political theory and practice may be appropriate to the relatively demobilized political culture in which feminists now live. Nevertheless, describing the operations of power is a necessary but not a sufficient means of resisting it.

Finally, it seems that deconstruction as a method has been grafted onto the a priori political place Scott occupies as a liberal feminist committed to exposing and countering inequality between men and women. This residual liberalism is both manifested and masked by the location of her arguments in her triadic model of women's history and politics. On one side stands an excessively woman-centered history and politics that one might call unreconstructed feminism; on the other, an excessively integrationist social history that is politically associated with Marxism and socialist feminism. But the question is whether gender can effectively transcend the privileged categories (women and class) offered by these approaches, or whether it will mark out only the rather muddy middle ground indicated by Scott's commitment to "equality." Although Scott makes it clear that pluralism isn't the political counterpart of "difference," one is bound to ask what a politics of difference would look like in practice. It is in any case questionable whether deconstruction is compatible with holding any particular political position, since it denies privilege to any one stance. Scott doesn't directly grapple with these problems, even though for many they will remain the biggest drawback to taking deconstruction seriously as a political tool.

Nevertheless, Scott's clear-sighted book

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deserves readers who are as willing to respect her objectives as she is careful not to overargue her case. Gender involves such complex, pervasive and variable meanings and effects that—unlike the bolder clash of class—uniquely strenuous (yet often barely visible) ideologies and practical efforts are required to keep gender pinned down to a simple and punishing binarism. At the same time, these efforts can elicit a vigorous and creative intellectual and political defiance. Joan Scott's spirited and intelligent contribution to the disclosure of this—I think she might agree—endless dialectic of power and resistance is to be welcomed. □

FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

The Accidental Tourist
Rain Man
Talk Radio

Here are five reasons you might prefer watching a *Star Trek* episode for the seventeenth time to seeing *The Accidental Tourist*:

1. *Star Trek* is shorter. Only "The Menagerie," which is a double episode, lasts as long as *The Accidental Tourist*; and even with that one, you can get up periodically for a beer. There are no commercial breaks in *The Accidental Tourist*, which drags on for two hours and seems longer than any film I've seen since *The Dawn*, an epic tribute to Indonesian military prowess shot in Cinemascope and bad color.

2. The acting is better in *Star Trek*. Yes, it's hard to believe that William Shatner could out-act anybody. But then, *The Accidental Tourist* stars William Hurt at his most deeply committed. He sighs; he speaks his lines as if talking to himself; in rare moments of animation, he lifts his head. Cast him in *Batman* and he'd probably underplay.

Hurt's character in this film is a man addicted to routine. He systematizes his emotions out of existence—but there's no sense of the underlying panic such a man must feel as the world presses on him. For that, he would have to show the possibility of losing control, and control is to Hurt as broken crockery is to Julian Schnabel, the sign and substance of his intention to be regarded as serious. In *The Accidental Tourist*, Hurt is like Mr. Spock trapped in the body of Captain Kirk, trying halfheartedly to mimic those strange emotions of the humans.

In the role of Hurt's estranged wife, Kathleen Turner goes about her task with grim determination. What has become of the brilliant comic actress who went toe to toe with Steve Martin in *The Man With Two Brains*? All we have left of her is the voice of Jessica Rabbit. Geena Davis, as the dog trainer who saves Hurt's soul, provides just the gawky charm that's required of her. But then, the requirement is all too easy to read, which leads us to the next point.

3. Lawrence Kasdan did not write or direct any episodes of *Star Trek*. You may therefore watch them all without fear of the Kasdan Touch. Too smart to revel in the more vulgar tricks of filmmaking, too constricted to invent anything better, Kasdan typically provides physical detail in place of character but then forbids his actors (and his audience) from having fun with the shtick. Think of the parade of suitcases in *The Big Chill*. You are what you pack is the message of that scene (and of *The Accidental Tourist*). First Kasdan defines his characters as so many brands of hair dryer, then he urges the audience to care about these walking, talking appliances.

A comparison between the film and the Anne Tyler novel it is based upon is instructive. I assume people read her books for the same reason they eat Quaker Instant Oatmeal—it requires no effort and seems to be good for you. Though the product may be bland, it is nevertheless warm and comforting. Little did I suspect that film, the barbarians' medium, would make Tyler's perfectly inoffensive novel read like Rimbaud. But that's the Kasdan Touch. He prunes the main character of bizarre habits—his system of keeping the dishes stacked in a solution of chlorine bleach, his method of doing the laundry while showering by means of trampling the clothes underfoot—leaving Hurt with a single, emblematic bit of business in the laundry room to show that he's quirky. It's as if Kasdan wanted to make a film about an eccentric but was afraid to make him seem odd.

4. The morals you derive from *Star Trek* are more impressive. *The Accidental Tourist* presents Hurt as a guidebook writer who specializes in advice for business travelers—that is, for people who want to feel as if they've never left home. At the beginning of the film, Hurt en-

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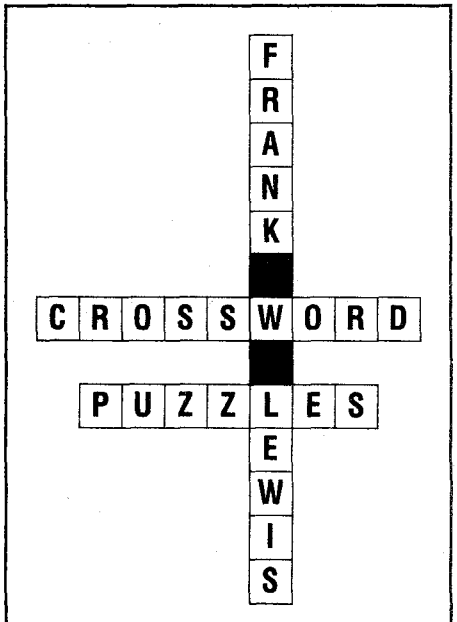

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counters a satisfied reader who assures him that the guidebooks let him travel as if in a cocoon. At the end of the film, Hurt announces, "It's wrong to think we can plan everything, as if it's a business trip." I assume most people knew that from the start. Is there supposed to be some pleasure in watching the character spend two hours catching up with the audience? I prefer *Star Trek*, which tells you things you need to know—for example, that you should respect the other life forms in the galaxy and live with them in peace. That's a potentially useful lesson; and, given the disparity on our planet between the rates of moral and technical evolution, it's probably none too soon to start driving it home.

5. In one of my favorite *Star Trek* episodes, Captain Kirk travels back in time and falls in love with Joan Collins, who is goofily cast as a manager of a Depression-era rescue mission. It's a magnificently silly bit of drama, which nevertheless ends with a cleverly understated plot twist and a moment of pathos. *The Accidental Tourist* ends just as you would expect, on a long and overstated close-up of the star. He has chosen a new life with Geena Davis. But does he love her? Is he full of joy and desire? No. He merely accepts her, as if life went around handing out Geena Davises on every corner. Don't expect to want other people; just make do with them. That's the real moral of *The Accidental Tourist*, a film that uses mature resignation as a mask for self-satisfaction. And that's why I prefer *Star Trek*—because Captain Kirk really loved poor, saintly Joan Collins.

In *Rain Man*, Dustin Hoffman curiously recalls William Hurt in *The Accidental Tourist*. As Raymond Babbitt, Hoffman talks to himself, avoids eye contact, eats food no Hollywood powerluncher would touch and lives by the clock. Practically the first words out of his mouth are "Eight minutes to Wapner," as he heads toward a TV set tuned to *The People's Court*. He walks as if someone had sewn helium balloons into the sleeves and cuffs of his K-mart clothes; his head, when not pointed toward a TV screen or a book, always seems to be turned in the wrong direction. This man really *is* odd. But his bizarre rituals, designed for self-preservation against the world's chaos, are not some shallow conceit invented by a moralizing filmmaker.

Raymond is an autistic savant, confined to an asylum in Cincinnati. He is both uncannily gifted—able to memorize whole phone books at a single glance—and helpless. Removed from the asylum by his slick, hustling brother Charlie (Tom Cruise), Raymond can't even cross the street by himself. He stops dead at the first sight of a "Don't Walk" sign and refuses to budge, no matter how many cars honk at him. He also frets about the slightest break in his routine, repeating phrases and gestures tirelessly until his brother, like the audience, is ready to scream. Sentiment ultimately wins out in *Rain Man*, as it's likely to do in any mass entertainment about such a character. Before it does, though, Hoffman and his director allow Raymond to be funny, grating, infuriating and eerily impressive—a man who makes you marvel at the possibilities of the heart and mind.

Unfortunately, the surroundings don't live up to the character. Directed by Barry Levinson from a screenplay by Ronald Bass and Barry Morrow, *Rain Man* is a buddy picture with one buddy missing, a road movie without much to see along the way. Levinson does not let the film fall below a certain level—even the character of Charlie's girlfriend (Valeria Golino) turns out to be stronger than the bimbo plot-convenience one anticipates—but neither does the film rise to the heights of *Diner* or *Tin Men*, for which Levinson had full authorship. *Rain Man* is just good enough to make you wish it had been better.

The plot—a minor distraction, concerning a disputed inheritance and a shady business deal—is little more than an excuse for introducing Charlie Babbitt to the older brother he never knew existed. It's a serviceable, though unimaginative, reason for sending Charlie and Raymond on a cross-country car trip, thus allowing the two men time to get to know each other. There are a few subtle observations along the way, such as an implied comparison between Raymond's autism and the behavior of small-town bores and Las Vegas slot-machine players. There are also some observations that are less than subtle, such as the point that Raymond is superior in many ways to his "normal" brother. Even Charlie finally wakes up to that idea, about forty-five minutes after the audience. Everything about Charlie, from his sharp clothes and baby-faced petulance to his willful ignorance of Raymond's gifts, marks him as a knave. It's all too easy for the audience to feel superior to this man. Obviously, none of *us* would treat Ray-

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Holly comes from a cold heaven
and enters our city on flatbed trucks.
Here honest artificers wait

with ribbons and cunning snowmen.
On the river that winds through town,
people skate in aching parabolas.

Handel is once again transported
and in our house we loosen exemplary
boxes of oranges riddled with cloves.

Outside the frosted windows, cans
are frozen to the streets, amute
as we are, aghast at the sun and dazzle

of fact fragmenting: high rose windows
and the Apollo Belvedere seem
mere islands of belief that drift.

By sags and rises kitchen string lifts
popcorn. Hallelujahs worry the walls.
But lustre fools our language; if someone

should say, "Merry," we *are*, greenhorns
like holly, soaking up the sun, shining,
prickling, according to natural law.

Emily Hiestand

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mond so badly. So great is the sense of self-congratulation pressed on the audience that soon one begins to look down on the actor as well as the character. Is Charlie being stupidly insensitive to Raymond? Or is Tom Cruise, with his lesser talent, failing to notice that Dustin Hoffman is acting up a storm?

The characters make their way west through a generic landscape—America as observed in a Chevy commercial—stopping in Las Vegas for some drearily predictable business, then proceeding to Los Angeles, where they reach a finale but not a climax. Have the brothers changed during their time together? Apparently Raymond has. With only a little prompting, he can now intone the one great lesson Charlie has taught him: K-mart sucks. I'm sure the Hollywood power-lunchers must feel that Charlie has truly redeemed himself if he has passed on this insight to his unfortunate brother.

Finally, a word of warning about *Talk Radio*, Oliver Stone's adaptation of the play by Eric Bogosian.

In the theater, *Talk Radio* was a virtuoso showpiece for Bogosian, who played the host of a radio call-in show. The drama unfolded in real time, with Bogosian hectoring and ranting almost nonstop for ninety minutes, his heroic efforts interrupted only by some occasional—and embarrassing—addresses to the audience from his colleagues at the radio station. Now the play has been opened up for the movies, which means the occasional, brief embarrassments have been expanded into long, persistent ones, while the sense of the performance as an endurance test has vanished.

The talk-show host is set up as a rotten character—the sort of man who improvises lies about visiting Dachau just to score a point. Yet, in what I can read only as an expression of the author's regard for his own person, the film finally asks us to care about the man. "He's all alone out there," his colleagues cry (evidently too concerned to think of a fresher way to say it). "He's going down in flames." So what?

Thanks to Stone's direction, Bogosian's character has now become as unappealing to the eyes as to the heart. He looms before you in close-up like Ernest, the loquacious yokel of a thousand TV commercials. Add to this Stone's fondness for carousel shots and racking focus, and you have the reason for my warning: If you intend to see *Talk Radio*, plan to eat *after* the movie. □

MUSIC.

GENE SANTORO

Cowboy Junkies
Sonic Youth

They stand almost dead still on stage, as if they're engulfed by ghosts. By rock standards their decibel level is downright discreet; as a fan pointed out, they somehow manage to deepen their intensity without touching the volume. They never unleash an uptempo blitz, their singer rarely moves beyond her breathy and tuneful monotone, but their music curves unexpectedly with suggestiveness, invention and nuance. They are the Cowboy Junkies, and their neo-psychedelic blend of folk touches, country flourishes and blues deluxe is spellbinding.

The Trinity Session (RCA) was recorded live in a church using one microphone feeding directly to a digital two-track machine—a low-key revolt against the customary high-tech, forty-eight-track production. Augmenting their basic rock quartet lineup with pedal steel and dobro, accordion and harmonica and mandolin, the Junkies have here extended their abilities to match their musical ambitions. Take, for example, "Misguided Angel." Starting from a traditional country trope—the daughter explaining to her family why she loves a wild type—it deepens the narrative shadows and allows for more contrast and resolution than is usually available in Nashville material. While the accordion wheezes and the mandolin trills and the dobro sighs and moans, vocalist Margo Timmins describes how her lover actually fits the family's requirements—in some ways he reminds her of her father, he's passionate like her brother said a lover should be, and so on—and then pivots the tune's refrain on the flatly sung line that runs simply, "Misguided angel, love you till I'm dead." That terse, unresolved drama is characteristic of the Junkies' own tunes, from the lilting blues of "I Don't Get It" and the hippie-country roadache of "200 More Miles" to the haunting "Postcard Blues."

Nor are their versions of other people's songs any less inventive, frightening or revealing. Hank Williams's plaintive "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" is here transmuted into a hushed but stabbing number and Patsy Cline's first national hit, a 1957 ditty called "Walking After Mid-

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night," becomes in the Junkies' hands a deep Chicago blues, its chordal structure obliterated and replaced by zydeco accordion and slashing bottleneck guitar.

The Junkies offer a late-1980s success story to match their musical accomplishments. After recording two albums on their own tiny Latent label, they gave a showcase performance during this summer's New Music Seminar, the annual industry confab to check out "alternative music trends." Though the band didn't go on stage until 3 in the morning, the tape they passed around the convention won them the Best New Artist citation. Then RCA signed them, and so *The Trinity Session* is being reissued as the Junkies' major-label debut.

Alternative music is a phrase with a revealingly hollow ring. A few years back it was mostly used to describe the rough-edged, garage-band style of rock populism found on independent labels that serviced the campus circuit; now it refers to any music that can be sold to more adventurous rock-oriented college students. The major labels have been promoting music aimed directly at that market in the last few years: They found that not only did some college-oriented acts sell a lot of records but that college radio could be used to "cross over" certain kinds of acts into Top 40 status. One result was that the major labels began raiding independent rosters for "alternative music."

Which is one reason Sonic Youth can—and does—find itself sharing the category with Cowboy Junkies, even though the two bands could hardly have less in common. Gales of electricity howl through Sonic Youth, and a live performance can be a little like being mugged while giving blood in the middle of Kennedy Airport.

Their new release, *Daydream Nation* (Blast First/Enigma), is also their first with major-label distribution—Enigma is a large independent distributed by Capitol. But the album makes no compromises. Veterans of the No Wave era a few years back (a couple of members worked with Glenn Branca's immense guitar armies and learned about the mind-warping power of odd overtone combinations and offbeat tunings), Sonic Youth have harnessed the volatile physicality of that industrial-noise attack and brought it back to rock and roll. The song structures they use are as arbitrary as some of their lyrical jump cuts. Chord sequences will suddenly lurch up or down rather than following any recognizable course of harmonic modulation; melodies are little more than scrawled shouts against the mountainous ranges of compacted noise they generate. Avoiding Branca's somewhat self-aggrandizing postures, they plot tunes whose terse, imagistic lyrics are taut enough to bounce a quarter—or a college student's head—off of.

In "Teen Age Riot," for instance, the narrator notes sardonically that the mayhem he describes is the only thing that can get him out of bed. Or there's "The Sprawl," whose title comes from science fiction novelist William Gibson's name for the twenty-first-century megalopolis where everything is always for sale, and there's always more in the back room. Other tunes sport ironic titles like "Kissability." If the pictures these songs present are hardly reassuring, they have a kind of gritty truth—something like vacation snapshots taken by an acute schizophrenic. □

LETTERS.

(*Continued From Page 38*)

"hole at the center" of the book. He sees significance in what he calls a "missing" half decade—from the time Hiss left the Nye Committee until Rogin takes up the narrative in 1941 at the State Department—with Hiss having "nothing to say" about Whittaker Chambers, his "most important friend" during the "years" in which their lives were "entwined"; about "the Communists and other radicals in the Hiss circle"; about "the relationship of American Communism to the American left and the New Deal at home and to the Soviet Union abroad," and on and on and on. These "political omissions cast a shadow over the entire book and raise doubts about even the personal recollections, Rogin says. But this is true only if one ignores Hiss's sworn testimony over four decades that he was never a member of the Communist Party; never sympathized with its aims; had no friend who, to his knowledge, was a Communist; never saw Chambers after the spring of 1936; saw him at most five or six times; never saw him after he, Hiss, joined the State Department in September 1936; and that his politics were those of a staunch New Dealer. Rogin's speculations about the "hole at the center" of the book (with an invented suicide of Hiss's older brother, Bosley—who was a victim of Bright's disease—thrown into the scenario to supply motivation) can only be seen in context of Hiss as confidence man, Hiss as depicted by Whittaker Chambers and Richard Nixon.

Recollections of a Life "is a beautiful book," Rogin says, but after a mere two paragraphs of his allocated space saying why this is so, he goes off into a never-never land of speculation, misrepresentation and factually untenable postulates, through all of which he wades in sublimely arrogant ignorance—of the Hiss case, of the man and of the stated structure of the book under review. Surely readers deserve something better. *William A. Reuben*

ROGIN REPLIES

Berkeley, Calif.

First and most important, I deeply regret conflating the death of Hiss's brother Bosley from Bright's disease with the suicide of his sister, Mary Ann. But the link between Bosley and Whittaker Chambers derives from Alger Hiss's *Recollections*, where Hiss wonders if he befriended Chambers because the man reminded him of his dead bohemian brother. There is also other evidence—such as Josephine Herbst's memory of the meeting between Hiss, Chambers and John Herrmann—that the link between Hiss and Chambers was deeper than Hiss has acknowledged. After Chambers attacked Hiss, not necessarily before, Chambers became his most important friend of the 1930s. The actual nature of their tie will always be uncertain, just as the evidence of forgery by typewriter is by no means as clearcut as Margaret Halsey would like. That is one reason it is time to shift the ground from conspiracy to politics. Many honorable people have committed decades of their lives to defending Hiss's innocence, and I did not expect them to be happy with a review rejecting the alternatives between which William Reuben insists that I must choose, that Hiss was either innocent victim or confidence man. I never wrote that Hiss belonged to a Communist cell. But the claim that Alger and Priscilla Hiss had nothing to do with Communists in the 1930s is, given their friendships, simply not credible, unless one is accusing Hiss of a degree of political innocence that would itself have historical significance. I suggested that in turning politics into conspiracy Hiss's defenders and accusers alike failed to come to terms with the nature of the popular front and the cold war—with Stalinist terror in the 1930s and 1940s and the postwar Red scare in the United States. The hysterical American equation of Communism with treason makes it understandable that many on the left are still unwilling to disentangle admirable commitments to social change in the 1930s Communist movement from the endorsement of mass political murder. One would have liked to read Alger Hiss's recollections of his political evolution between 1936 and 1941. But given Hiss's criminalization, I respected his reasons for political silence, the hole in the center of his book. It is that absence from which these long, indignant letters, with less justification than Hiss, continue to avert their eyes. *Michael Rogin*

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T	E	E		L						H		Y	E	S
U	N	L	E	A	S	H		C	H	A	P		L	
R		E				E		U		U		V		D
N	I	G	H	T	C	L	U	B		F	L	A	I	R
O		I		H		P		I		F		S		I
V	E	S	T	I	G	E		C	H	E	K	H	O	V
E		T		N		R		L		U		T		E
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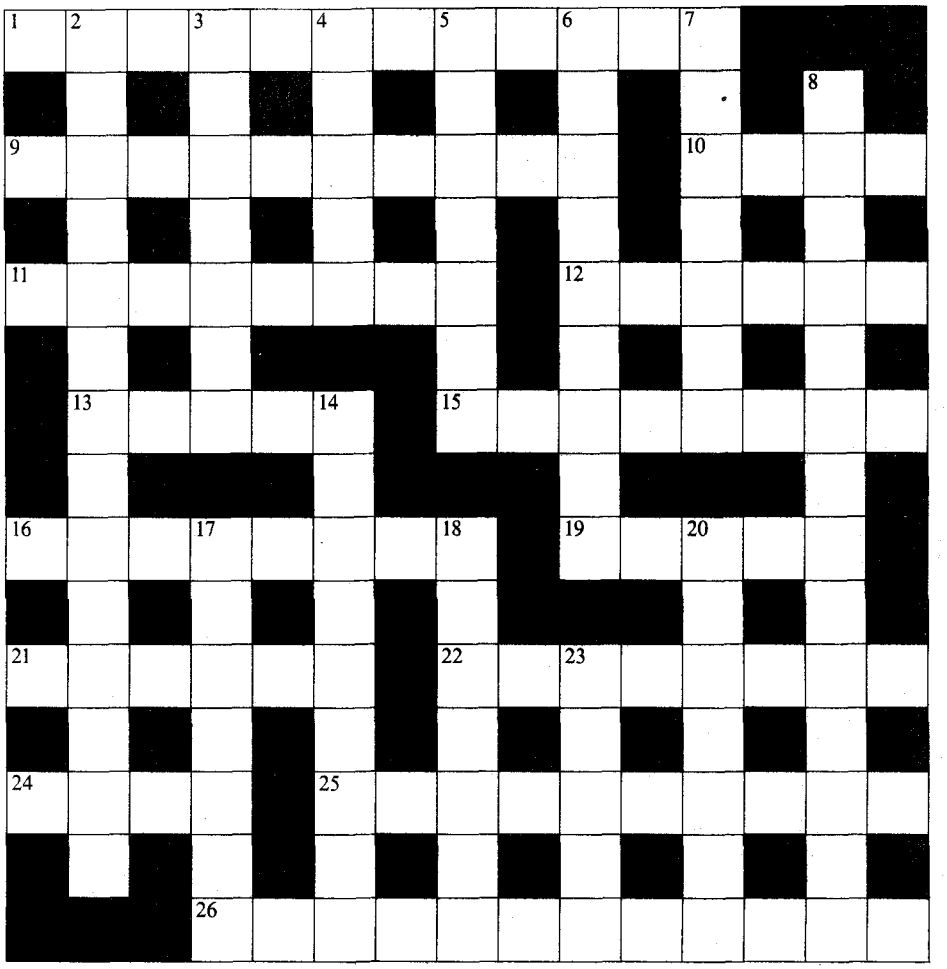
Crossword Puzzle No. 2225

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Have the body, as Caesar might have said, make something that starts the investigation. (6,6)
9 A professional one with pull—especially useful to the farmer, as well as the mathematics student. (10)
10 The part of the house Iago comes back in? (4)
11 Possibly remain an old countryman, now living in the U.S.S.R. (8)
12 Once-trendy art, with what a model does to fight back? (6)
13 Table-turning sound from one of Mary's friends. (5)
15 A relative of Pinnipedia making an article some environmentalists won't buy? (8)
16 Enthusiasts possibly root for them in the square at certain gatherings. (8)
19 One might hold art to be like a sea-storm to the Spanish. (5)
21 What comes after F and the next two letters caused a certain amount of resistance. (6)
22 Possibly the older tie hung around for some time. (8)
24 Musical featuring a couple of soldiers, duplicating 21 in the extreme. (4)
25 Where one now can help oneself to the essence of France? (3,7)
26 The quality of Janus shows it was of scented make-up. (3-9)

DOWN

2 An Illinois city with something uninteresting of Cassius Clay's, seen in the light of certain northerners. (6,8)
3 See 23
4 A religious teacher got along in society, as they say, with one. (5)
5 But they don't have to be al fresco picnics! (7)
6 Through the pass, took in what might be brew. (9)
7 Escapes, when narrow, for the escapers, possibly losing the first point. (7)
8 And youth will have its fling . . . (4,4,2,4)
14 . . . but one who errs might be given a good one. (7-2)
17 Sort of fits what one must do, putting two and two together inside it, but one must follow the latest fashion! (7)
18 An old region lies, as I imagine, in Europe. (7)
20 Point to a very small number showing what sugar might do! (7)
23 and 3 Where a 17 might be found if one carries things a long way. (2,3,7)

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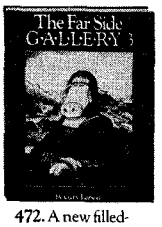

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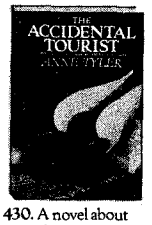

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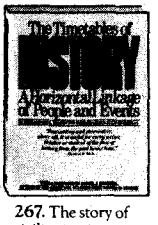

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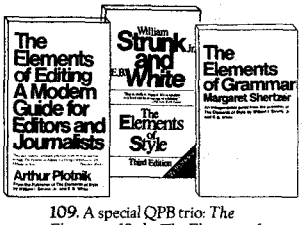
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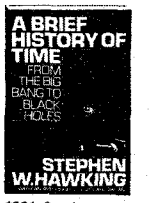

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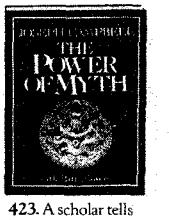

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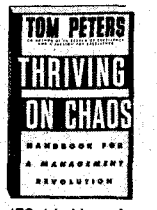

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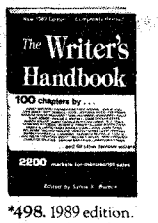

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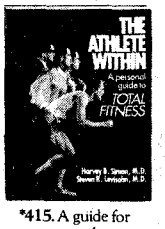

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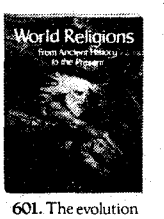

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